"KALAMAZOO'S 'FIRST FAMILY' OF THE ARMED FORCES": THE NELSON FAMILY AND WORLD WAR II

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Dedicated to:

Phyllis Nelson Matteson (1921 - 1996)

and Arthur L. Matteson (1917 - 2007),

happily married for more than 54 years

Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.

Emily Brontë

Preface and Acknowledgments

World War II is considered to be *the* defining moment of the twentieth century and its story can be told in numerous ways: battles fought, lives lost, nations changed. It is a story that can also be told through individuals. Approximately sixteen million people from the United States served in World War II. This thesis addresses the story of one family, the Nelson family of Kalamazoo, Michigan, and that family's involvement in World War II. A few years ago, my great-aunt showed me a newspaper clipping about my great-grandparents, James and Vera Nelson. The *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* named them "Kalamazoo's 'First Family' of the Armed Forces" because all six of their sons and their son-in-law were serving in the war and they were going to be honored by the city of Kalamazoo.[1] That revelation inspired in me a profound interest in the history of the Nelson family and lead to the following research. Prior to that day, I knew very little about my grandmother's family of birth. Most of them lived in Michigan while we lived in Indiana. I knew that my grandmother was one of nine children and I knew some of her siblings' names, although I could never remember who was who in the single picture I owned of the whole family. Of my grandmother's family, I only remember my great-grandmother, Vera, who was seventy years old when I was born and therefore always a very old woman to me. This thesis is the result of a year's research; I consider it still to be an ongoing journey. I was astounded at the amount of assistance I received, from distant family member as well as complete strangers, some as far away as England. Thankfully, I feel I now know my grandmother's family very well. While I did include all relevant material about the family, I chose to respect the privacy of family members

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[1] Llyle Rapp, "City to Honor Family with Six Sons in Armed Forces," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 8 March 1944.

and, therefore, did not include some information that was not relevant to the topic at hand.

For specific information about the Nelson family in WWII, I obtained articles from the *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, conducted interviews with family members as well as strangers, read family letters, combed through high school yearbooks, city directories and Michigan censuses and acquired military records from the National Archives & Records Administration through the Freedom of Information Act.

I would like to thank the following people who contributed to this research: my grandpa Arthur Matteson, who spent hours talking with me about his experiences; Jim Nelson, whose help has been exceptional; Carol (Nelson) Malmud, who initially sparked my interest in genealogy and who contributed many family documents; Joel Nelson and Bob Nelson for their contributions; Professors Jonathan Nashel, Lisa Zwicker and Betsy Lucal of Indiana University South Bend for their comments and assistance; the staff of the Clarence L. Miller Family Local History Room, Kalamazoo Public Library; Sharon Carlson and the staff of the Archives at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo; Kevin Burge, archivist at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base; and the following military historians for their help regarding specific units: Joseph Chalker (454th Bomb Group), Syd Edwards (20th Fighter Group), Nick King (20th FG), David Knight (20th FG), and Arthur Sevigny (20th FG). All pictures in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are from the Nelson family collection, forwarded to the author from Jim Nelson, Carol Malmud and Arthur Matteson. Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband, Josh, who read many versions of this paper and answered countless questions.

Tom Brokaw has stated that my grandparents' generation is "the greatest generation any society has ever produced,"[2] and Stephen Ambrose, who called them the "we" generation, as in "We are all in this together," said that "they did more to help spread democracy around the world than any other generation in history."[3] The more research I did, the more I agreed with them. While certainly not perfect, this generation accepted an incredible challenge and was profoundly successful. After the war they came home and went back to work, with little fanfare or expectations of recognition. I have learned a great deal while conducting this research – about World War II, about the individuals who comprise the "Greatest Generation" and about the individuals who made up the Nelson family of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Nelsons were straightforward, hard-working people. They were certainly not perfect; but, like many of their generation, when World War II came along, they did what they believed was the right thing to do. They didn't think they were special; they simply did what was expected of them. By all accounts, they served admirably in the armed forces and all of their descendents should be proud. I know I certainly am.

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[2] Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation,* (New York: Random House, 1998), xxx.
[3] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany,* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 472-3.

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CHAPTER 1

BEFORE THE WAR

The Nelson family of Kalamazoo, Michigan, was fairly typical of families of the early twentieth century. James worked for the local post office while his wife, Vera, stayed home to raise their children. James was the disciplinarian and fairly strict with all the children; Vera followed his lead. They were married in 1915 in Hartford, Michigan, Vera's hometown, and had eight children over the next twelve years, six boys and two girls. Their ninth and youngest child, a girl, was born in January 1941. The Nelson family lived in a modest house on East Bush Street in Kalamazoo. The junior high school was merely a block away. During the 1940s, the neighborhood was working-class and unremarkable. The Nelsons were affiliated with both a Baptist and a Presbyterian church in Kalamazoo. The kids all graduated from the local public high school and were involved in music and sports.

Children who grew up during the 1930s and 1940s were different from children of today. Because they did not have video games, televisions and other sedentary, home-based recreation, they went outside the home and found amusement there, be it fishing, stickball or tree climbing. John R. Satterfield described how children in Waterloo, Iowa, and other small Midwestern cities played in those days:

> The nearby railyard, with its water tower to climb on and empty rail cars to hide in, was the children's rumpus room. Kids could collect loose coal in buckets there to sell to neighbors…Neighborhood kids also frolicked near the town dump and power plant on the Cedar River. An old stone quarry filled with water became "the B.A.B. That stood for Bare-Assed Beach." [4]

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[4] John R. Satterfield, *We Band of Brothers: The Sullivans and World War II,* (Parkersburg, IA: Mid-Prairie Books, 1995), 19.

Regarding play, children of the 1930s and 1940s may have been more imaginative and self-reliant than later generations. Or maybe children of later generations had parents who were more generous because they themselves had grown up during the Depression without a lot of things. It certainly seems, though, that children of the Depression years were quite inventive. Some "made toys out of orange crates and roller skates" or "made rubber guns from a piece of a 2x4, a half a clothespin, and a section of inner tube from a car tire."[5] Maybe they were more imaginative because, as one many explains, "[w]hatever games we played we didn't have adults supervising us; we made up our own teams and played by our own rules."[6]

Children, of all generations, invariably get in scrapes, although kids who grew up during the Great Depression may have fought more than earlier generations. Some comments about this from Satterfield's book include: "Life was hard, a real struggle. You had to fight to survive"[7] and "we were always in fights back then."[8] It is possible that this fighting attitude and ability to survive hard times may have contributed to that generation's ability to successfully wage war in the 1940s. About the Sullivan family, the subject of his book, Satterfield remarks:

> The Sullivans were not a family of enthusiastic warriors. The five young men scrapped if they had to, but they were not bullies. They shared a working-class roughness, but betrayed no mean streaks or bitterness toward the world. They were typical American working stiffs, average in size and demeanor, the sort rarely noticed outside the small circle of their lives.[9]

The Sullivans, like the Nelson family, would send all of their sons to fight World

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[5] Tom Brokaw, *An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation,* (New York: Random House, 2001), 9.
[6] Brokaw, *Album of Memories*, 9.
[7] Satterfield, 22.
[8] Ibid., 25.
[9] Ibid., 2-3.

War II. And, like the Sullivan family, Nelson family lore contains quite a number of stories about fights and men who "scrapped if they had to."[10]

Whether due to the effects of the Depression or the demands of work and family, the Nelsons traveled little. With the exception of the Nelsons' son-in-law, Art, who was born in Colorado, the Nelsons had barely traveled outside of Michigan. The Nelsons were just an ordinary midwestern family who soon found themselves seeing the country and spread all over the world. Before the end of 1945, Nelsons had visited over fourteen different states as well as England, Italy, New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, the Philippines and New Guinea.

These foreign lands would contrast greatly with the home they left. In 1940, the population of Kalamazoo, Michigan, was just over 54,000; growth was occurring outside the city limits as opposed to within them; and the city was feeling the impact of the impending war well before Pearl Harbor.[11] Kalamazoo citizens were being drafted in 1940 and 1941, and "everyone was wondering whether America would be swept into the maelstrom of war."[12] With U.S. involvement, Kalamazoo industry began turning to war production. According to Willis F. Dunbar, formerly of Western Michigan University:

> Sixty-five major manufacturing plants in Kalamazoo were engaged in essential war production, and it was estimated that employment in war production was between 16,000 and 20,000…A wide range of military equipment and supplies was produced in Kalamazoo plants. This included paper for the military services, armor plate, transmissions, machine gun turrets, cargo trailers, parts for howitzers and anti-tank guns, amphibian tanks, struts and landing gear, parachute bomb flares, and even 12,000,000 cigarette lighters…All this was accomplished with many new, untrained workers. [13]

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[10] Satterfield, 2-3.
[11] Willis F. Dunbar, *Kalamazoo and How It Grew...and Grew...*, (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1969), 182-3.
[12] Dunbar, 182-3.
[13] Dunbar, 184.

Eventually, approximately one-third of the city's "normal force of 18,000 workers were in the fighting forces."[14]

Some of those workers who joined the military would come from the Nelson home. As the United States entered the war, the Nelson family consisted of: Kendrick, 26; Leo, 24; Lyle, 22; Phyllis, 20; Stephen, 18; twins, Joel and Paul, 15; Esther, 14; and Carol, 11 months (fig.1). Leo was serving in the U.S. Army, having been drafted in January 1941; Kendrick, Lyle and Stephen were all working in Kalamazoo; Phyllis had just married Arthur Matteson, who also was working in Kalamazoo; and Joel, Paul and Esther were all in school.

For the Nelsons, as well as the rest of the United States, life was irrevocably changed after Pearl Harbor. Historian Henry H. Adams has asserted:

> When Americans woke the next morning, shock had been replaced with rage and by an urgent, overwhelming desire to get on with the job. Throughout the country, recruiting stations were swamped. Block-long lines of men waited patiently in the cold, crisp morning air . . . Soon orders came that in the major cities recruiting stations were to remain open twenty-four hours a day. The young and the old, the halt and the hale, the college boy and professor, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker – all doubts gone, all questions set aside – they came in thousands to pay back in kind the bloody attack on their country.[15]

Patriotism surged and large numbers of men enlisted. According to Stephen E. Ambrose, "[t]he U.S. armed forces had more enlistments that day than on any other day in American history."[16]

On the other hand, as historian Michael Adams points out, "there is a tendency in popular thought to magnify America's contributions."[17] The established view is that the

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[14] Dunbar, 185.
[15] Henry H. Adams, *1942: The Year That Doomed the Axis,* (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1967), 34.
[16] Stephen E. Ambrose, *To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 94.

American people were united in their belief that World War II was a "just war." As time has progressed, Americans have embraced a more romantic view of WWII and the United States' role in it. There is a tendency to forget or gloss over the less attractive facets of the war like the discrimination faced by African-Americans, women and Japanese-Americans. There is also a tendency to glorify fighting and ignore the very real damage done to soldiers and civilians, both here and in other countries. It was much easier for Americans to do so because their homes did not become a war zone like so many other countries.[18]

Americans also romanticized their fighting forces. According to Michael Adams:

> Many Americans believed that the WWII military was America's most ideologically committed fighting force. Hollywood boosted this image by having a leading character in each war movie deliver a speech to his appreciative buddies on the need to be out there fighting for freedom.[19]

That is not to say that American troops did not feel that the United States should be involved in the war; they overwhelmingly agreed with U.S. involvement. However, according to Michael Adams, "there was a pragmatic sense that here was a job to be done and that the only way through was to get on with it."[20] Although I can neither confirm nor disprove it, based on what I know of their personalities, I believe that the Nelsons were probably motivated more out of a sense of duty than by a romanticized view of fighting or the military. This belief is reinforced by the fact that none of the Nelsons made a career of the military and only Paul served after World War II.

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[17] Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 69.
[18] Ibid., 73-4.
[19] Ibid., 88.
[20] Ibid., 89.

Regardless of their reasons, like so many American families, the Nelson family became involved in the war effort. Between January 1941 and February 1944, all six of the Nelson sons, as well as their one son-in-law, were inducted into or enlisted in the armed forces. The Army, Army Air Corps, Navy and Marines were all represented in the Nelson household. By war's end, the Nelson family boasted of lieutenants, corporals and staff sergeants, pilots and seamen, and mourned the loss of one son who was killed in action. The seven individuals from the Nelson family who served in the military do not represent every one of the 16 million who served from the United States. Likewise, the Nelson family's experience did not represent the wartime experience of the average American family. However, it can be argued that the Nelsons personified the American military experience in World War II. Some Americans enlisted while others were drafted; the same is true for the Nelsons. Like America itself, Nelsons fought against Germany and Italy in the Mediterranean and European Theaters and fought the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Like America, Nelsons protected the Home Front and trained other soldiers. As was true of all Americans, Nelsons were worried about their loved ones, either overseas or at home. And, like most Americans, every one of the Nelsons contributed in meaningful, yet different, ways to the Allied victory.

CHAPTER 2

DECEMBER 7, 1941: JAPAN ATTACKS PEARL HARBOR AND THE PHILIPPINES

By the time Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, the Nelson family already had one member in the military. On January 27, 1941, Leo was inducted into the United States' Army at Fort Custer, Michigan. Leo James Nelson had been born in Kewadin, Michigan, on September 7, 1917. He was James and Vera's second child and second son. In 1935, he graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School, where he had participated in the CHS glee club and drama class and had enjoyed bowling and baseball.[21] After graduation, Leo worked for the U.S. Postal Service until he was drafted in January 1941. He completed his basic training at Fort Custer, Michigan, and was initially assigned to the Fifth Reconnaissance Troop.[22]

Fort Custer is five miles west of Battle Creek, Michigan, and it served as a reception and induction center during World War II. Approximately 300,000 men were formally enlisted in the Army and Army Air Corps at Fort Custer. It also served as a training center and processed and housed prisoners of war (POWs).[23] Four of the Nelsons' seven soldiers would eventually spend time at Fort Custer: Leo in 1941 and Stephen, Kendrick and Arthur in 1942. Leo completed his basic training at Fort Custer and was promoted to corporal on August 6, 1941 (fig. 2).[24] According to his brother-in-law, Art Matteson, Leo had originally been scheduled to finish his military service at the

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[21] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1935.
[22] United States Army, "Military records of Leo J. Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, May 2006.
[23] Richard E. Osborne, *World War II Sites in the United States: A Tour Guide & Directory,* (Indianapolis, IN: Riebel-Roque Publishing Co., 1996), 126.
[24] "Military records of Leo J. Nelson."

end of 1941.[25] However, Pearl Harbor changed the plans of many people, including Leo, who was not discharged as scheduled.

In January 1942, Leo was sent to officer candidates' school at Fort Riley, Kansas.[26] About 60 miles west of Topeka, Fort Riley had long been considered the home of the cavalry, having served as a school for cavalry and light artillery since 1887. During WWII, Fort Riley trained both horse-mounted and mechanized cavalry units, and approximately 150,000 soldiers were trained at Fort Riley.[27] In March 1942, Leo graduated as lieutenant of cavalry from Fort Riley. He spent the remainder of his time in the cavalry at various bases in Kansas and Kentucky.[28]

In early 1942, the Nelson family would be featured for the first of many times in the local newspaper. While the exact date is unknown, January 1942 seems likely since the article states that Leo is in the army but makes no mention of anyone else being in the military. The article is entitled "One family choir…the Nelsons…'Singingest' in all Kalamazoo" (fig. 3).[29] The article explains that James had been a professional musician, continued to sing and had instilled his love of music in his children. According to this article, every Nelson child, except for 13-month-old Carol obviously, had performed in school related music productions. It jokingly states, "If the day ever comes when war needs necessitate the ban on radios, phonographs, and other musical instruments, it will strike no fear into the hearts of" the Nelson family.[30]

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[25] Arthur Matteson. Oral interview with author, 25 February 2007.
[26] "Military records of Leo J. Nelson."
[27] Osborne, 94.
[28] "Leo J. Nelson Air Lieutenant," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 25 May 1943.
[29] "One Family Choir…the Nelsons…'Singingest' in all Kalamazoo," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* n.d.
[30] Ibid.

The reference to a ban on musical instruments is indicative of the conditions during World War II. Much more so than World War I, for the United States, World War II was a total war that included all segments of the American population. According to Lyons, total war "involved a close inter-relationship between a nation's economy, its technology, and the mobilization of its civilian population for the purpose of winning the war."[31] For the United States, mobilization of its citizens involved accelerating production of goods to help the war effort; saving and reusing goods in the form of waste paper, rubber and scrap metals drives; rationing scarce commodities; and growing victory gardens. It included celebrity-endorsed war bond drives and citizen preparing themselves and their neighbors for attack. Americans were continually reminded to contribute to the war effort.

The *Kalamazoo Gazette* did its part to rally the public. Starting on December 7, 1941, and continuing throughout the war, the *Gazette* kept the public updated on military events and how the war was affecting Americans locally as well as nationwide. On December 7, 1941, the *Gazette* published an extra edition announcing the attack. The *Gazette* would continue its use of extras throughout the war. As historian Paul D. Casdorph explained, "Although an 'extra' is unknown to younger-generation Americans, during World War II each turn in the conflict brought out newsboys hawking the inevitable 'extra' that detailed faraway theaters of operation."[32] Whereas the first

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[31] Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 237.
[32] Paul D. Casdorph, *Let the Good Times Roll: Life at Home in America During World War II.* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 2-3.

headline of December 7 stated, "President ignores Jap government; sends message direct to emperor," the extra edition announced in huge letters, "JAPS OPEN WAR ON U.S."[33]

The *Kalamazoo Gazette* educated its readers by printing maps of all the battle zones. It also reported news of the draft, "Nation to register all men 18 to 65"[34] and informed the public that "Kalamazoo Gazette carriers have volunteered as official U.S. defense agents to supply you at home with 10¢ defense savings stamps"[35] and "Kalamazoo Mobilizes for $30,400 War Fund Campaign."[36] The rush of young men to enlist was also the topic of many articles such as "'Lemme at Them Japs' Cry of Local Youths as They Enlist"[37] and "75,000 Register In Michigan for Emergency Duty."[38]

Whether in response to the bombing, because of the media coverage, or for some other reason, shortly after Pearl Harbor the next Nelson son would join the military. Stephen J. Nelson, the Nelsons' fifth child and fourth son, was born in Kalamazoo on October 29, 1923, and graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School in 1941. He was active in the music program. Prior to joining the armed forces, he worked for the F.W. Woolworth Company in Kalamazoo. On January 27, 1942, Steve enlisted in the Army Air Corps at Fort Custer, Michigan (fig. 4).[39] According to his brother-in-law, Art, Steve probably joined partly because of Pearl Harbor and partly because his brother was in the service.[40]

The Nelsons' only son-in-law was also involved in the war effort. On January 26, 1917, Arthur Leland Matteson was born in Cripple Creek, Colorado, a town that in 1920

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[33] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 7 December 1941.
[34] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 12 December 1941.
[35] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 12 December 1941, emphasis in original.
[36] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 21 December 1941.
[37] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 18 December 1941,
[38] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 25 December 1941.
[39] Rapp, "City to Honor Family."
[40] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, April 2007.

had a population of less than 6,700. He grew up in Battle Creek, Michigan, and graduated from Battle Creek High School. Arthur was the only Nelson soldier who was married, having wed Phyllis Nelson, on November 28, 1941. Art and Phyllis were living in Kalamazoo when he was inducted March 23, 1942, at Fort Custer, Michigan (fig. 5). The Army had turned him down on previous occasions due to dental problems. He was told that he did not have enough teeth and he "couldn't chew steak"; therefore, the Army wouldn't accept him.[41] However, after Pearl Harbor, the Army needed as many men as possible and accepted him. Still to this day, he laughs when sharing that story, commenting that throughout his entire time with the Army, he was never once served steak.

After Art was drafted, Phyllis had to make changes in her life as well. Phyllis Lenore Nelson, the oldest Nelson daughter, was born December 18, 1921, in Kalamazoo. During her senior year at Kalamazoo Central High School, Phyllis met Arthur Matteson (fig. 6), who was the older brother of her friend, Harriett. After graduating from Kalamazoo Central High School, where she followed in the family tradition and participated in musical productions, Phyllis attended a business college in Kalamazoo. She then got a job working as a clerk/typist for the Kalamazoo Industrial Bank and worked until she and Art were married in November 1941. When Art was drafted in 1942, Phyllis moved in with her parents, James and Vera. It was necessary for Phyllis to move in with her parents for financial reasons. When he was first in the military, Art received only $21.00 a month and sent $15.00 of it home to Phyllis. Because she could not afford a place of her own, she paid room and board to her parents. She returned to the bank and worked there until she had their first child. Art believes that, because she

[41] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, 25 February 2007.

had a child of her own and had to share a house with her siblings, the hardest part of the war for Phyllis was living with her parents.[42]

While many spouses and girlfriends of servicemen became what were known as "camp followers," Phyllis did not follow Art from base to base and stayed in Kalamazoo until much later in the war. A popular trend of WWII, camp followers did exactly what the name suggests. They "decided they were going to have as much time together as they could while their husbands were still in the United States."[43] They would find "whatever housing they could, as near to their husbands as they could be, and took whatever time he had left over after the military got their allotment of him."[44] The military, as well as the general public, were not generally supportive of camp followers. The historian Emily Yellin has noted:

> Their presence was often unwelcome on already overcrowded trains, in strange towns, and even in long grocery lines when food rationing was implemented. Many thought that instead of traipsing across the country using valuable space and resources, these women should instead stick close to home and do something more useful, less selfish, for the overall war effort.[45]

The military did not provide any support, financial or otherwise, to them and did not even keep records of their numbers. However, the camp follower's reward, undoubtedly, was to come from her husband and not from the military. Whether because of her job or because she had the support of her family, Phyllis chose not to follow Art around the

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[42] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, April 2007.
[43] Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II,* New York: Free Press, 2004), 16.
[44] Yellin, 16.
[45] Yellin, 17.

United States from base to base. In October 1942, their first child, Janet, was born, while Art was stationed at Niagara Falls, completing Bell Aircraft training.[46]

Support of their family was crucial for wives of servicemen. For women who had no family or lived away from their family, life was harder when their spouses left. According to Casdorph:

> Families by the hundreds of thousands were disrupted by their menfolk going into uniform, but particularly disheartening was the "lonely wife" or young married woman without children who was left behind. Frequently living beyond the reach of their own families with little money or meaningful job prospects life was tedious for such women. [47]

While many women began working in factories and other places in support of the war, it was often single women who did this work while married women were encouraged to remain at home and volunteer their time doing war work. Women were encouraged to do their patriotic duty in ways that conformed to the accepted rules of gender at the time. Anderson quotes a Seattle newspaper when discussing war roles:

> Men fight the war with bayonets, long hours at defense jobs, 'leisure' hours at air-raid drills. Women fight the war with stewpans, knitting needles, alarm clocks that go off at 4 o'clock in the morning, rudely awakened babies, unelastic budgets, fast-rising prices…the kitchen and the sewing room are the housewife's battleground. [48]

Even "Rosie the Riveter" was portrayed as feminine, with a makeup puff in her pocket, so as to point out that, even though she was doing a "man's job," she was still a woman.

It is unclear what combination of factors affected Phyllis's decisions to stay in Kalamazoo with her parents and stop working after giving birth. During my lifetime, she was employed by, and retired from, one company where she worked as a secretary, so it

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[46] Art Matteson. Interview with author, April 2007.
[47] Casdorph, 87.
[48] Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 87.

is surprising to me that she didn't work during the war. It may have been due to the fact that she had just given birth to her first child and did not feel confident enough in her parenting abilities both to work and to care for her daughter. Likewise, it may have had more to do with the times. Acceptable behaviors for women were different during the war than later in her life. She may have been influenced, at least in part, by the media's ideas of gender roles.

For Phyllis and other American women, the media defined and reinforced gender rules in many ways, one of the more pervasive media being women's magazines. Women's magazines had a significant readership and the most popular often had subscriber lists of up to eight million. The actual number of readers, however, would be much higher since copies were usually shared. Women's magazines would have had considerable influence on the lives of women in 1940s America, as there were few forms of entertainment available to the average woman. The magazines covered all aspects of the lives of American women and were a reflection both of the topics American women were interested in as well as the topics the publishers felt were important. These reasons would "make them an important source of information about the cultural history of the twentieth century."[49] As scholar Nancy A. Walker explains:

> As soon as the United States formally entered the war…the magazines adopted a pro-war effort stance that seldom wavered…[V]irtually all aspects of magazine content – including advertising, fiction, and editorial columns as well as nonfiction articles – instructed readers on ways to assist in the war effort: planting "victory gardens" to counteract food shortages, writing encouraging letters to absent husbands, and coping efficiently and cheerfully with product rationing and shortage. Nor were women's war efforts to be limited to the household. Articles encouraged

[49] Nancy A. Walker,ed., *Women's Magazines 1940-1960: Gender Roles and the Popular Press*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), 5.

> women to find volunteer work in hospitals and school, and they presented admiring profiles of women who did so. [50]

These magazines would have influenced most women. Later in her life, Phyllis was an avid reader of women's magazines and always had issues of *Ladies Home Journal, Redbook* and others lying around her home. For this reason, I feel fairly certain that she would have read and been influenced by the women's magazines of the 1940s.

Many of the articles that Phyllis would have read indicated how women were to act. In the January 1944 *Ladies' Home Journal*, the article "You can't have a career and be a good wife" appeared and warned that "[m]ost insidious of all is the danger threatening the girl who really finds her work stimulating" because "the young woman who is giving her best to her work cannot give her husband and home all they deserve."[51]

In addition to how to be a mother and how to act during wartime, women during WWII were continually inundated with information about how to clean their homes or rather, how to achieve "housekeeping perfection."[52] They were reminded that appearance was crucial or, rather, "Looking good was a duty, requiring hard work and commitment."[53] These examples show that women were supposed to do their part for the war but not brag or be too proud of it. They were supposed to sublimate any desire for satisfaction in a career and focus on their family instead. Women were supposed to commit, not to work or a career, but to their appearance and housekeeping. These types of articles would certainly have had some bearing on Phyllis's decisions.

As Phyllis endured living with her parents, her younger brother, Steve, continued his training. After basic training at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, Steve attended radio

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[50] Walker, 23.
[51] Ibid., 72.
[52] Ibid., 145.
[53] Ibid., 193.

operator training at Scott Field in Illinois, graduating on July 28, 1942, as a radio mechanic.[54] One of only five army bases remaining from World War I, Scott Field housed training programs for a variety of specialties, including radiomen, aircraft and auto mechanics, engineers and meteorologists. As many as 150,000 people were in training at Scott Field at various times throughout WWII.[55]

Steve then attended aerial gunnery training in Harlingen, Texas, where he graduated, in August 1942, as an honor student with the wings of an aerial gunner.[56] Harlingen Army Air Field is located on the United States/Mexico border, near the mouth of the Rio Grande River. It was one of only two "flexible gunnery" schools in the country.[57]

Meanwhile, Steve's older brother, Leo, was working as an instructor of weapons and in August of 1942, he was transferred to Fort Knox in Kentucky for armored force school.[58] Fort Knox is probably most famous for its storage of gold reserves. However, during WWII, it became, in the words of historian Richard E. Osborne, "one of America's foremost training centers for armored units."[59]

While serving at Fort Knox, Leo applied for and was granted a transfer to the Army Air Corps.[60] The cavalry had stopped using horses, and once the cavalry began using only tanks, Leo decided to transfer. According to his son, Jerry, Leo "said those

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[54] United States Army, "Military records of Stephen J. Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author May 2006.
[55] Osborne, 79.
[56] Robert Eugene Meader, "Stephen J. Nelson," *Meader Historical Directory,* n.d., Kalamazoo (Michigan) Public Library.
[57] Osborne, 237.
[58] "Service notes of Leo J. Nelson," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 15 August 1942.
[59] Osborne, 97.
[60] "Leo J. Nelson Air Lieutenant," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 25 May 1942.

tanks weren't for him!"[61] His transfer was made official on March 26, 1942.[62] Leo did not begin his new training until September 1942, completing his pre-flight training at San Antonio, Texas; primary training at Sikeston, Missouri; basic training at Enid, Okalahoma; and advance training at Aloe Army Field in Victoria, Texas.[63] Leo (fig. 7) trained on various planes, including the PT-19, the BT-13 and the AT-6, before beginning his training on B-24 bombers.[64]

The fact that two Nelson sons became pilots is fairly impressive, especially considering the odds. Most of those who applied for pilot training never finished. According to historian Stephen Ambrose:

> For the men being tested, the most feared word was "washout." The process began immediately – slightly more than 50 percent of them failed either the initial physical or written tests and were packed off to the infantry. The AAF expected that result, and further that more than 40 percent of those left would fail to complete the courses of Primary, Basic, and Advanced school.[65]

Their brother-in-law, Art, does not remember either Steve or Leo ever expressing a strong desire to become a pilot. Their choice of specialty may have been a result of success on the initial tests and a desire, as officers, to be in control of their Army careers. In any case, both Steve and Leo possessed the mental and physical capabilities needed and, by all accounts, became exceptional pilots.

Another Nelson would join the military as Lyle entered the Marines in August of 1942. Lyle Edward Nelson, the Nelsons' third son, was born September 19, 1919, in Kalamazoo and graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School in 1937. He

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[61] Jerry Nelson to James Nelson, 25 July 2002, forwarded to author July 2006.
[62] United States Army, "Certificate of Honorable Discharge, Leo J. Nelson," forwarded to author, May 2006.
[63] "Leo J. Nelson Air Lieutenant," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 25 May 1942.
[64] "Training Checklist of Leo Nelson," forwarded to author, December 2006.
[65] Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Wild Blue: The Men and Boys Who Flew the B-24s Over Germany*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 52.

participated in school music programs, baseball and softball.[66] His sense of humor is showcased in a notation in a classmate's yearbook, which read "Remember me as a fellow sufferer in physics. Lyle Class of '37."[67] After high school, Lyle began working for Western Electric, where he was employed when he enlisted in the U.S. Marines on August 20, 1942 (fig. 8). According to his son Jim, Lyle traveled to Detroit, Michigan, with some friends and unexpectedly became a Marine. Jim explains:

> [Lyle] accepted the offer of a free train trip and overnight stay in Detroit for taking the Marine physical not expecting to pass due to slow recovery from a surgery. However, of the three friends on the trip he was the only one accepted and thus became a US Marine to my grandfather's chagrin.[68]

According to Jim, Lyle had "tried to join all the other services before finally volunteering for the Marines."[69] Jim believes his father's first choice was either the Navy or Army Air Corps.[70] Of the military branches, James Nelson thought the least of the Marines and wished that none of his boys would become one. Apparently, James "thought the Marines were all roustabouts [and] drunks, basically bums in uniform."[71] James felt that the Marines had been used dishonorably to quell civil unrest in Latin America to protect American business interests. He had hoped that his sons would "serve in what he felt were more honorable services, i.e. the army or navy."[72] Regardless of how he became a Marine, Lyle traveled to San Diego, California, a few days later for basic training.[73] San Diego housed the headquarters of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and thus had a reputation as a

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[66] Kalamazoo Central High School, Delphian, 1937.
[67] Florence Fenstermaker. Interview with author, 24 March 2007.
[68] James Nelson to author, 17 May 2006.
[69] James Nelson to author, 23 November 2006.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] United States Marines, "Professional and Conduct Record of Lyle E. Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, May 2006

Navy town. Before World War II, Camp Elliott in San Diego had been leased to the Marines and was used as a training base for large Marine units.[74]

As of the end of 1942, the Army wasn't done drafting Nelsons. In December, Kendrick was inducted into the Army Air Corps (fig. 9). Kendrick Dundon Nelson, the oldest child of James and Vera Nelson, was born on August 29, 1915, in Kewadin, Michigan, and grew up in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Like his siblings, Kendrick graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School, where he participated in music, bowling and softball.[75] After high school, Kendrick was employed at the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company, which was a part of the larger paper industry in the Kalamazoo area.[76] On December 28, 1942, he was inducted into the Army Air Corps at Fort Custer, Michigan. Kendrick was twenty-seven years of age at the time of his induction and "was finally accepted into the Air corps despite an old leg injury."[77]

It is interesting to note that Kendrick, Lyle and Art all were initially denied for induction based on physical deficiencies. We should not assume that the Nelsons were, on the whole, an unhealthy bunch. In fact, many soldiers were rejected. Whether a result of growing up during the Depression, a result of the United States moving away from a need for physical labor in favor of mechanized labor or other reasons, the general consensus among military doctors was that many American men were not physically fit. Said Casdorph:

> Military doctors and post commanders noted deficiencies in overall fitness of draftees from the beginnings of the Selective Service…Authorities reported a steady decline in the fitness of males from eighteen to forty-

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[74] Osborne, 28.
[75] Central High School, Delphian, 1935.
[76] Rapp, "City to Honor Family."
[77] James Nelson to author, 11 May 2006.

> five…[T]he older the man the greater likelihood of health defects that precluded military service.[78]

Regardless of initial rejections, many men would eventually be accepted and the United States was able to field a successful, and large, armed forces.

After he was finally accepted, Kendrick completed basic training in St. Petersburg, Florida, and was then transferred to Sioux Falls army air base in South Dakota for radio school.[79] WWII-era Sioux Falls is known for one thing: the Sioux Falls Army Air Force Technical Training Command Radio Training School. Its goal was to "teach young soldiers how to build and operate radios for use during the war."[80] From its inception in July 1942 until its closing May 31, 1945, the school trained classes of 20 to 25 students twenty-four hours a day in radio theory, aircraft recognition and Morse Code as well as taught them "how to build and operate transistors, receivers, and every other radio component."[81] One of only two schools with this mission, it was estimated that approximately half of the Radio Operator-Mechanics (ROMs) in Europe during WWII had been trained at Sioux Falls.[82]

Like most military families during WWII, the Nelson family began displaying a banner with stars in their window (fig. 10). The practice had started during WWI, and during WWII, it continued and increased. Blue stars in a window would represent a family member who was serving, while a gold star would represent one who had been killed while serving. Casdorph comments on the practice:

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[78] Casdorph, 87.
[79] Rapp, "City to Honor Family."
[80] Old Courthouse Museum booklet, "Radiomen: The Story of the Sioux Falls Army Air Force Technical Training Command Radio Training School" n.d., 1.
[81] Ibid., 4.
[82] Ibid., 5.

> Before the war ended, qualification for military service was expanded to catch eleven million men in the draft net; it was a rare family indeed with no sons or daughters called into uniform before 1945. Throughout the war living room windows of tenement and mansion alike displayed white silken banners with a blue star or stars to signify the number of loved ones in uniform. As the war dragged on, gold-hued stars began to replace blue ones in homes saddened by casualties on unnamed battlefields – battlefields that are history-book footnotes forty years afterward. The patriotic emblems – they could be seen at every crossroads – purchased at countless five-and-dime stores were constant reminders to stay-at-home civilians of a distant war.[83]

By early 1944, the Nelson window would display seven blue stars with the names Leo, Lyle, Steve, Art, Joel, Paul and Ken written on them.

[83] Casdorph, 4.

CHAPTER 3

WORLD WAR II IN 1943

During 1942, most of the Nelson soldiers had been busy with various types of training and had yet to see any combat. However, in 1943, the Allies' ability to wage war was beginning to reach full potential; the Allied leaders were meeting in Casablanca to decide on strategy; and the first Nelson would be sent overseas into a battle zone. Lyle was first assigned to the 3d MP Co and then to the 3d Signal Company of the 3d Marine Division and continued training in San Diego until he was sent to Auckland, New Zealand, in February 1943.[84] Along with the rest of the 3d Marine Division, Lyle traveled to New Zealand on the SS *Lurline*, a luxury liner refitted for military use, spending almost two weeks traveling from California to New Zealand.[85]

In his book, *A Marine from Boston*, John J. Carey wrote about his experiences as a Marine in World War II. Carey was also aboard the SS *Lurline* in February 1943, and he described his memories of that first trip.

> As we left, many of us sat on the fantail watching San Diego and the United States disappear over the horizon. This sight made us a little homesick and to this day I remember sitting beside my best friend, Ray Durling from Rutland, Vermont. Ray spoke out loud enough to be heard by all of us, "Good-bye America. This is my last view of you"...The ship was loaded with everything for war. This included food, supplies of every type, explosives, and ammunition. The decks were loaded with fighter planes all packed together with their wings up, and some large trucks which provided shade as we played casino and hearts.[86]

One can only imagine what Lyle, a 23-year-old from Kalamazoo, Michigan, who enlisted on a whim, was thinking as he left California for the Pacific. After the war, Lyle didn't

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[84] United States Marines, "Military Records of Lyle E. Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, May 2006.
[85] Ibid.
[86] John J. Carey, *A Marine From Boston,* (Garrett Park, MD: Garrett Park Press, 2000), 69.

talk much about his experiences and his son, Jim, described him as "very modest about his service."[87] We can assume that, like John Carey and his buddy, Ray, Lyle was experiencing a mixture of emotions that must have included homesickness and at least some apprehension.

In July 1943, as the Allies began their invasion of Italy and the war in the Pacific heated up, Lyle and the 3d Marine Division traveled from New Zealand to Guadalcanal in the British Solomon Islands, arriving on August 1, 1943. Their time at Guadalcanal was spent training and rehearsing for the upcoming invasion at Bougainville. In November, the 3d Marine Division left Guadalcanal for Bougainville where they would see the most action. Lyle participated in the opposed landing at Torokina Point, Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, on November 1 and November 2. He was also involved in offensive operations against the Japanese in the Battle of Laruma River, Empress Augusta Bay, on November 7 and November 8. Later in the month, from November 21 to November 24, Lyle participated in the Battle of Piva Forks at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville.[88]

Lyle was a field wireman for the 3d Signal Company, 3d Marine Division. Communicators, especially wiremen, were responsible for laying wire for telephone communication while also participating in battle and defending themselves against snipers. In his book, *A Ribbon and a Star*, John Monks, a member of the 3d Marines who landed on Bougainville, describes the job of communications personnel on the island. Monks states:

> Communicators with their coils of wire, compasses, field 'phones, and climbers – plus their packs and arms – constitute a group of men who take

[87] James Nelson to author, 11 May 2006.
[88] "Military Records of Lyle E. Nelson."

> some beating...If good communication between units isn't number one on the list of important requisites in a jungle combat operation, it is crowding the top-flight priorities very close. Miles of wire have to be laid and maintained. The communicators are the rugged band of technicians who go out all during the day and night performing this important drudgery: carrying the wire, providing their own security against the enemy, running the omnipresent risk of being mistaken for the enemy and being shot by their own men (they sometimes are), climbing and tying wire in trees, tying-in the various units, following a wire down to a break and effecting the repairs after the wire has been torn down by an amphibian tractor or one of the other vehicles.[89]

The 3d Marines invaded Bougainville on November 1, 1943, and stayed there until January 1944.

Although the Marines spent an uncomfortable couple of months on the island, their memories of Thanksgiving 1943 probably stand out amongst other memories. Marine headquarters had decided that the troops would be served turkey, regardless of what else was going on. Unfortunately, an advance had already been scheduled for that day, and the attacks would have to take place. Somehow, all of the troops, even those on the front lines who were engaged in battle, got their turkey for Thanksgiving. Carrying parties moved the turkey forward to the front lines, even though they were faced with sniper fire.[90] Monks described the day:

> Late in the afternoon, carrying parties tried to get the birds, cut into large chunks, up to the front lines. Some of the meat got there, some didn't. But it was a good stunt, and a necessity; no one would have been forgiven if it had been left to rot down at the Division Commissary just because we had a battle![91]

While it was undoubtedly uncomfortable, that Thanksgiving was probably the most memorable one ever for those soldiers.

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[89] John J. Monks, *A Ribbon and a Star: The Third Marines at Bougainville,* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1945), 161-162.
[90] Harry A. Gailey, *Bougainville 1943-1945: The Forgotten Campaign*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 110.
[91] Monks, 212.

The Bougainville campaign, while not well known, was nevertheless quite important to the eventual Allied victory. Major John Rentz of the Marines explains:

> The story of Bougainville and the Northern Solomons is perhaps not so arresting nor so stark as those of Tarawa or Iwo Jima, and received comparatively scant attention at the time, being forced to inner pages of the press by more dramatic contemporaneous events in the Gilberts and in Africa. The Northern Solomons was an essential campaign nevertheless, and it was as difficult and hard-fought in its own way as any that had preceded or any of those that followed.[92]

The success of the Bougainville operation negated the effectiveness of the Japanese bases on Rabaul, which contained Japan's air forces. The Allies were then able to advance closer to Japan through New Guinea and the Philippines. The Marines' success at Bougainville directly helped other troops. Said Rentz, "Victories of Marines in the Northern Solomons had assured other American troops of easier going elsewhere."[93]

While Lyle was fighting the Japanese in the Solomon Islands, Steve was continuing with his pilot training. He trained in Santa Ana, California; Blythe, California; Pecos, Texas; and Chandler, Arizona. On October 1, 1943, at Chandler, he received his wings as a twin motored fighter pilot and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant.[94]

On the Home Front, Kalamazoo Central High School was doing its part for the war effort. In 1943, Joel, Paul and Esther all attended CHS. The influence of the war was evident on the school yearbook, the *Delphian*. Various articles announced that "Approximately 205 students joined the National Victory Corps this year, thus signifying

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[92] Maj. John N. Rentz, USMCR, *Bougainville and the Northern Solomons,* (Washington, DC: U.S. Marine Corps., 1948), 130.
[93] Rentz, 131.
[94] "Stephen J. Nelson service notes," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, Kalamazoo Public Library.

their interest in participating in the all out war effort program available to youth."[95] Pictures showed students selling war bonds and folding dressings and rolling bandages for the Red Cross.[96] The *Delphian* also showed pictures of the CHS scrap metal drive that collected so much scrap metal that busy Westnedge Avenue had to be closed (fig. 11).[97] Later pages talked about the usual high school fare: the prom, final exams and graduation. However, they also included references to the war, like "Friday made it official and everyone left – destination? – Army, navy, job, vacation or just home – who knows?"[98] The *Delphian* also listed the names of the eight members of the senior class who had entered the service before the close of the school year.[99] Undoubtedly, Joel, Paul and Esther were all aware of the school's contributions.

Various forms of entertainment and propaganda flourished throughout the war. Even though paper was scarce, book and comic book sales grew, with most titles having war-related themes. Popular music reflected the U.S. involvement in the war with songs like, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" and "You're a Sap, Mister Jap."[100] Americans were faced with the predicament of, for the first time in a while, having money in their pockets to spend on entertainment with little to spend it on. Gas and rubber were both rationed, so travel was rare. Broadway continued to produce shows, many intended to entertain servicemen. Unlike Broadway shows, motion pictures were available all over the United States, in big cities as well as small towns. Consequently,

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[95] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1943, 26.
[96] Ibid., 27.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.,
[99] Ibid., 25.
[100] Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: America During World War II,*(Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1986), 33.

movies, such as *Casablanca, Sergeant York* and *Meet John Doe*, became a popular form of entertainment during WWII.

Movies of the time period inevitably included both newsreels and war-related themes. While newsreels are probably foreign to those of us born after the war, they were everywhere during World War II. Said Casdorph, "It was perhaps the newsreel, a now-abandoned art form, that most shaped public perception of the war throughout the duration."[101] Newsreels provided news of the battlefields to Americans anxious for information. One woman's recollections explains the importance of the newsreel:

> We would be ready to see *Mrs. Miniver,* or whatever the movie was that night. But first there would be the newsreel. Without television back then, that is how we knew what the war looked like. The battle coverage…It was black-and-white, and it would really bring it home. When you just heard about the war, you had to imagine things and picture it in your mind. But the newsreels made you see it.[102]

Newsreels brought the war home to many people since "Americans went to the movies in record numbers" as "admissions increased about 33 percent" from prior years.[103] And it wasn't just youngsters who spent their time at the movie theater. According to Casdorph:

> Hollywood's latest outpourings made local theaters a hub of activity in the days before television. Everyone from junior to grandpop flocked to feature films – many of them with war related themes – the minute they hit town. It was the golden age of filmmaking with actors catching the public imagination in a way that is almost difficult to understand in the 1980s. [104]

Well aware of their popularity, the government utilized movies to the fullest. Director Frank Capra, who had enlisted in the Army after Pearl Harbor, was assigned to produce films for the armed forces; these were ultimately released to the public. His series of

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[101] Casdorph, 22.
[102] Bob Greene, *Once Upon a Town: The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen,* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 180.
[103] Winkler, 35.
[104] Casdorph, 128.

documentaries later became known as the *Why We Fight* series, and included *Prelude to War*, which won the Academy Award for best documentary in 1942.[105] While the Capra series is classic propaganda, as it was designed to bolster support for the war, more popular movies of the time period also contained war-related themes. Movies produced by Hollywood with war-related themes included Capra's politically flavored *Meet John Doe*, starring Gary Cooper; the Broadway show turned movie *This is the Army*, starring future president Ronald Reagan; and the classic *Casablanca* with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Some movies, like *This is the Army*, were up-front about their patriotic message, while others, like *Meet John Doe,* were less obvious.

In addition to messages about the war, movies of the time reinforced gender norms. Motions pictures told both men and women "that they had vital roles to perform, but they were very different roles – very different from each other and from prewar constructions of masculinity and femininity."[106] For women, movies would usually steer them towards home, hearth and family; "[t]hus films often showed women involved in all sorts of activities from flying planes to running companies, but in the last five minutes, they invariably gave it up for love."[107] Since wartime movie attendance was up, some theaters stayed open around the clock and women made up two-thirds of the audience; thus, scores of women would have been inundated with these gendered messages.[108]

Movies that likely influenced the Nelson women and other Americans included Irving Berlin's *Holiday Inn*, Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe*, and *This is the Army*, starring

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[105] Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies,* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 122.
[106] Robert L. McLaughlin and Sally E. Parry, *We'll Always Have the Movies: American Cinema During World War II,* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 216-7.
[107] McLaughlin and Parry, 218.
[108] Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s,* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 191.

Ronald Reagan. In *Holiday Inn*, the male stars, Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire, fight over two different female co-stars, one a cold-hearted gold digger and the other a sweet, passive girl. The Bing Crosby character has an old, African-American housekeeper/cook who quietly and happily goes about her servant duties until called for to deliver a rousing speech that spurs him to go after the woman he loves.[109] In *Meet John Doe*, a female journalist desperately starts a string of events over which she quickly loses control. The scheme is then taken over by a host of strong, male characters. She does, however, surface at the end of the movie to help convince the male lead, Gary Cooper, to do the right thing.[110] In *This is the Army*, Reagan plays one of the male leads and refuses to marry his girl because of the war. He doesn't want to leave her a widow with kids, but she is desperate to marry him. She doesn't give up, finding an officiant without his knowledge and convincing Reagan's character to marry her.[111] These films all portray women in one of two ways. One version portrays women as beautiful and, initially, able to contribute to society. Ultimately, however, these women are subject to the decisions of men and find that they need a man to save them. The other popular stereotype shows women as old, matronly and wise.

The messages were different for men because, in the movies from the WWII era, men needed "to be willing to fight and, if necessary, die for his country" while at the same time maintaining his individuality.[112] Movies during the war, whether subtle or obvious, reinforced the idea of American men as heroes, albeit sometimes different kinds of heroes. The classic, *Casablanca*, "asks what the role of a man should be in the present

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[109] *Holiday Inn*, 101 mins., Paramount Pictures, 1942, videocassette.
[110] *Meet John Doe*, 135 mins., Warner Bros., 1941, DVD.
[111] *This is the Army*, 90 mins., Warner Bros., 1943, DVD.
[112] McLaughlin, 217.

war and ends by redefining the notion of a hero," as Humphrey Bogart sacrifices his love for the greater good.[113] Capra's *Meet John Doe* is a cautionary tale of power run amok and the perils of American fascism; the leading man has integrity yet is imperfect. He makes his mistakes and yet, at the end of the movie, is the hero because of his strength of conviction.[114] In Irving Berlin's musical, *Holiday Inn*, Fred Astaire steals Bing Crosby's girl because Bing will not stand up for himself. The girl, of course, pretty much lets them decide where she is going and with whom. Interspersed throughout the movie are classic songs and great dance numbers, including the introduction of the song "White Christmas" and a moving Fourth of July performance complete with scenes of war workers and other symbols of freedom.[115] These films all portray American men as flawed but honest men with integrity and the strength to stand up for what is right.

I noted earlier that I believed the Nelson men were inspired by a sense of duty as opposed to a romanticized view of fighting. That is certainly not to say that they failed to be influenced by the established gender norms of the day that portrayed men as the fighters and protectors and women as those who were to be protected. These types of gender ideas were reinforced during WWII for the bulk of American society. The males were the warriors who went off to faraway lands to protect their homeland and make the world safe. It was important for soldiers to prove their manhood, to others as well as themselves. Historian Stephen E. Ambrose explains:

> About themselves, the most important thing a majority of the GIs discovered was that they were not cowards. They hadn't thought so, they had fervently hoped it would not be so, but they couldn't be sure until tested. After a few days in combat, most of them knew they were good soldiers. They had neither run away nor collapsed into a pathetic mass of

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[113] *Casablanca,* Warner Bros., 1942, videocassette.
[114] *Meet John Doe.*
[115] *Holiday Inn.*

quivering Jell-O (their worst fear, even greater than the fear of being afraid). [116]

This proof of manliness may have led to a "tougher manliness" or "John Wayne syndrome" for men in the United States.[117] They needed to be "hard, tough, unemotional, ruthless, and competitive."[118] For the most part, the Nelson family conformed to these types of gender norms, as the men did indeed go off to fight the war and the women did stay at home to take care of the children.

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[116] Ambrose 1997, 47

[117] Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 278.

[118] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

WORLD WAR II IN 1944

The new year would see even more Nelsons join the military. Twin brothers, Joel and Paul Nelson, the youngest Nelson boys, both enlisted almost immediately after graduating from high school (fig. 12). Joel and Paul were born on February 24, 1926 in Kalamazoo; both graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School in January 1944.[119]

Like the rest of the family, Joel had participated in music in high school.[120] He enlisted in the Naval Reserve shortly before his eighteenth birthday and was stationed from February 12, 1944 to July 3, 1944 at Western Michigan College in Kalamazoo.[121] Joel was a part of Western Michigan's V-12 officer training program, which had been established in 1943 to train Navy officers.

The V-12 program trained more than 60,000 officers, both Navy and Marine, in World War II. Over 130 colleges and universities housed trainees and this helped keep the colleges fiscally solvent during the war.[122] The Navy and Marines benefited because they got properly trained and educated officers. The V-12 program opened the doors to a college education for many men who otherwise would have gone without it. While some critics felt that the V-12 program was a way for young men to stay safely at home while a war was going on, one cannot deny the benefit to the Navy and Marines, the colleges and, most especially, to the trainees themselves. Numerous V-12 alumni went on to excel in sports, politics, business and the military. Famous alumni of the V-12 program include

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[119] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1944.
[120] Ibid.
[121] United States Navy, "Military Records of Joel Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, July 2006.
[122] James G. Schneider, *The Navy V-12 Program: Leadership for a Lifetime.* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), xi.

former U.S. senator, Daniel P. Moynihan; television personality, Johnny Carson; former U.S. attorney general and presidential candidate, Robert F. Kennedy; former presidential press secretary and U.S. Senator, Pierre Salinger; and former White House Chief of Staff and key figure in the Watergate scandal, H.R. Haldeman.[123]

The V-12 program was not without its detractors, however. While many communities welcomed the program and the colleges certainly benefited, some citizens of V-12 communities were less than impressed with the program. Historian James G. Schneider explains the issue:

> Every community had many young men fighting in the far corners of the earth, and the parents of those servicemen were understandably dubious about the wisdom of allowing other men from the same town to go to college while all the fighting was going on. Such as position was especially easy to arrive at for a mother living in a college town with a V-12 unit. Every day she could see young sailors and marines carrying books to class, walking down the street with girls, and having fun on Saturday nights and Sundays while her boy was fighting for democracy in some hellhole. Quite a number of those upset mothers fired off letters to their congressmen, the newspapers, and even President Roosevelt.[124]

The Navy answered these criticisms by pointing out that, because the V-12 program was so worthwhile, they had brought many men back from overseas to attend the program. In addition, the V-12 graduates would have far greater responsibilities after graduation.[125]

Paul Nelson, the last Nelson son to enter the military, also enlisted before his eighteenth birthday. Like Joel, Paul graduated from Kalamazoo Central High School, where he participated in music, robed choir, the swim team and the golf team.[126] On

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[123] Schneider, 341-55.
[124] Ibid., 287.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1944.

February 16, 1944, Paul enlisted in the Navy at the age of seventeen. He later received training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois.[127]

The entrance of the last Nelson sons into the military would bring public attention to the Nelson family. In March 1944, the *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* did a full-page article about the Nelson family, proclaiming them "Kalamazoo's 'First Family' of the Armed Forces" (fig. 13).[128] It was announced that they would be honored at a later date by the city commission and would be presented with an award commemorating their family's service. On April 3, 1944, James and Vera Nelson were presented with specially designed pins at a public ceremony (fig. 14). Vera received a "six-star Emblem of Honor pin" while James received a "service pin."[129] The vice mayor of Kalamazoo expressed his hope that all six of the Nelson sons would return home and said "Your boys, wherever they may be, are thinking of you and Mr. Nelson tonight, and are thinking of their home."[130] He continued, "We are all looking forward to the time when the boys can come home."[131] James spoke briefly, saying "We accept these fine tributes not for ourselves, but for our sons. They are the ones who are sacrificing."[132] Joel and Paul were able to attend the ceremony, as they were both training nearby.

To those of us who have never had to experience a war of the magnitude of WWII, the thought of sending all six of your sons into battle is probably inconceivable. However, this experience was not unheard of during the war; and the Nelson family was not the only family to send all of its boys into battle. The Sullivan family of Waterloo,

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[127] Rapp, "City to Honor Family."
[128] Ibid.
[129] "Parents of Six Sons in Service Honored by City," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 4 April 1944.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

Iowa, not only sent all five of their sons to the U.S. Navy, but all five were killed when their ship was sunk.[133] Likewise, all four sons of President Franklin D. and Eleanor Roosevelt entered the military, two in the Navy, one in the Marines and one in the Army Air Corps.[134] The Niland family of New York also sent all of their boys off to war. The Niland and Sullivan families would serve as inspiration for the movie, *Saving Private Ryan.*

It appears that one of the more difficult parts of the war for families of servicemen was the waiting. In Tom Brokaw's *An Album of Memories,* one woman explains how the "women, wives of the men, would gather early to wait for the mail to be put up at the little post office. Oh how we wished for a letter but were disappointed most of the time."[135] Another woman describes the daily wait for a boy on a bike: "In those days the telegrams were delivered by Western Union boys on bikes. My parents and I used to sit on the porch hoping the bike would pass our house."[136] Yet another woman describes how different the neighborhoods were after the war began:

> The most noticeable change was undefinable. The neighborhood was very quiet, a palpable, uneasy stillness caused by the absence of young men and the anxiety of their parents. All the young men we had grown up with and whom we loved and cherished as childhood companions had gone to war. And when the dreaded and terrible news was brought to a family that a dear son would never return home, as happened in our neighborhood, neighbors were the strength and constant source of comfort for the sorrowing and disbelieving family.[137]

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[133] See Satterfield, *We Band of Brothers* and Dan Kurzman's *Left to Die: The Tragedy of the USS Juneau.*
[134] See Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time.*
[135] Brokaw, *Album of Memories*, 246.
[136] Ibid., 291.
[137] Ibid., 243.

The daily wait for letters or a telegram would have been agonizing for parents with one son in the service. The wait for the Nilands, the Sullivans and the Nelsons, who had four, five and seven sons in the service, must have been nearly unbearable.

While his parents and sisters were home awaiting word of their loved ones, Paul was continuing his training. Later in the year, Paul was transferred to the USS *Blue Ridge*, where he stayed until the end of the war.[138] At some point during the war (the exact date is unknown), the ships of Paul and Joel were in close proximity to each other in the Pacific; and a visit was arranged for the twins on board Paul's ship, the *Blue Ridge*.[139] There is only one picture commemorating that event; it shows the smiling brothers shaking hands (fig. 15).

During WWII, the USS *Blue Ridge* was active in the South Pacific as the flagship for the 7th Amphibious Force under the command of Rear Admiral Daniel E. Barbey. The *Blue Ridge* spent the summer of 1944 preparing for the invasion at Leyte in the Philippines and took part in the landings in October. As the army forces stormed ashore, the fleet was assembled in Leyte Gulf and engaged in anti-aircraft fire on enemy planes. The invasion of Leyte, one of the larger islands of the Philippine archipelago, was the largest Allied amphibious operation to that date in the Pacific. It included the 701 ships of the US 7th Fleet as well as the soldiers of the US 6th Army. The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) committed almost its entire surface fleet to the battle at Leyte.[140]

The Philippine Islands were important to the Allies and the Japanese alike. The Japanese needed to retain control of the Philippines in order to maintain supplies of food

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[138] United States Navy, "Military Records of Paul Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, May 2006.
[139] Joel Nelson to author, March 2007.
[140] Charles R. Anderson, *Leyte: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 10,17.

and raw materials and to maintain lines of communication. They committed large numbers of troops to the islands and felt that keeping control of the Philippines could turn the tide of the war.[141] The Americans, and General MacArthur in particular, felt a moral obligation to the citizens of the Philippines and wanted to liberate them from the brutal Japanese occupation. In addition, the proximity of the Philippines to Japan was crucial. The Allies wanted to be able to disrupt Japanese communications and be close enough to attack Japan. The Allies' plan was to first take the islands of Mindanao and Leyte before moving on to the largest island, Luzon.[142]

As Paul was engaging the Japanese in the Pacific Theater, his older brother, Lyle, was leaving the area. Lyle (fig. 16) remained on Bougainville until January 1944, when his unit returned to Guadalcanal. Like many of the locations in the Pacific Theater, Bougainville was an unpleasant environment.

Bougainville's wet climate, abundance of mud and swamp all caused problems for the soldiers. The weather was uncomfortable for a number of reasons. According to historian Harry A. Gailey, "[I]t rained on seventeen of the first eighteen days after the landings."[143] Additionally, "[d]aytime temperatures would reach 100°, and men were forced to live in swampy areas where it was impossible to keep feet and legs dry."[144] Soldiers also had to cope with chronic diarrhea due to a lack of safe water and the threat of malaria due to mosquitoes. John Carey's description of the weather is similar to Gailey's. He describes the weather as such:

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[141] Dale Andradé, *Luzon: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II,* (Washington, DC: U.S. government printing office, 1994), 4.
[142] Charles R. Anderson, 7.
[143] Gailey, 122.
[144] Gailey, 123.

> This was the rain and mud capital of the world. When the first person walked on a trail, his weight made the water from the earth ooze up around the base of his boot. Each boot that moved over that area made it a little muddier and before long you were in six or seven inches of deep mud. There were places where we had to use four men to carry what a single man could carry alone. It took at least six men to move a stretcher through mud which was often over a foot deep.[145]

Eventually living conditions would improve as the swamps were drained and roads were built. While their accommodations were still rough, soldiers who arrived later did not have to suffer through what the first Marine and Army units had to deal with.

After enduring these conditions for many months, Lyle was transferred stateside, by way of Hawaii, in April 1944, due to "medical conditions (tropical disease and skin rot) directly due to service in the jungle."[146] The description of Lyle's medical condition as "skin rot" is probably quite accurate. Because of the combination of mud, sand, and hot, wet weather, many of the Marines on Bougainville were afflicted with diseases and skin conditions like jungle rot and jungle ulcers. Carey describes the condition:

> Many of us had something the called "tinea curis". . . an unknown or jungle crud, a rash that was always wet and running, and usually itchy. It was very uncomfortable, a real pain in the ass, and seemed to be getting worse since we arrived back on the Canal. . . When we got back to the Guadalcanal, it was dusty and dryer and the crud seemed to spread.[147]

There was no cure for jungle rot; but jungle ulcers could be treated by slicing them open with a razor blade and pouring sulfanilamide powder in the ulcers.[148] The medical condition filariasis was especially troublesome. Called "MuMu" by the indigenous people, filariasis was transferred by mosquitoes and was the first stage of elephantiasis. Carey elaborates:

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[145] Carey, 149.
[146] James Nelson to author, 17 May 2006.
[147] Carey, 327.
[148] Gailey, 123.

> It caused the lymph glands, in various parts of the body, to clog and swell. The skin is stretched, appears dry, similar to an elephant's foot. The victim could have enlargements in different parts of the body, mainly legs, arms, and testicles, and in the latter area was very painful. There was no known treatment.[149]

Those, like Lyle, who "only" suffered from skin conditions and chronic diarrhea, could be considered lucky to have escaped filariasis and elephantiasis.

After being transferred out of the Pacific due to his illness, Lyle traveled on the USS *William L. Black* in April 1944 from Pearl Harbor to San Francisco, a trip that took six days. He was stationed at Treasure Island, San Francisco, until his discharge. U.S. Naval Station, Treasure Island served not only as headquarters for the 12th Naval District but also as a reception and embarkation center. At times during the war, it processed up to 12,000 men a day; and many sailors and marines were discharged from Treasure Island after the war.[150]

Like his brothers, Paul and Lyle, Steve would see combat in 1944 as well. Steve went overseas in May 1944 and was active in the European Theater, piloting P-38 and P-51 fighters. As a member of the 8th Air Force (AF), 20th Fighter Group (FG), 55th Squadron, Steve flew from Kings Cliffe, Northamptonshire, in East Anglia, England. He amassed almost 400 hours of flying time while in the Army Air Force. Steve compiled 65.20 combat hours in England, 29.30 in the P-51 Mustang. He completed at least fourteen missions over Europe, in both P-38s and P-51s, bombing bridges and strafing various locations in France and escorting heavy bombers over Germany.[151]

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[149] Carey, 335.
[150] Osborne, 38.
[151] David Knight to author, 14 June 2006.

The 20th Fighter Group is one of the more celebrated groups of WWII. Numerous books and articles have been written by and about its members.[152] If being a pilot was a desirable goal, being a fighter pilot may have been the ultimate goal, although bomber pilots would undoubtedly disagree. Historian Stephen Ambrose describes the pilots:

> At the top of the elite world of the Allied air forces stood the fighter pilots. Young, cocky, skilled, veteran warriors – in a mass war fought by millions, the fighter pilots were the only glamorous individuals left. Up there all alone in a one-on-one with a Luftwaffe fighter, one man's skill and training and machine against another's, they were the knights in shining armor of World War II.[153]

Often fighter pilots are thought of as "heroes in individual combat with the enemy high in the skies"; or they were said to have "guts and determination" and "an extraordinary character."[154] Descriptions such as these undoubtedly lend to the romanticized view of pilots, which was not surprising. According to Ambrose, "Fighter pilots were special. They had swagger, bounce, energy."[155] In fact, while looking back on pictures from the time period, I noted that the pilots, more than any other soldiers, radiated an air of confidence and cockiness and smiled in a smug, almost arrogant, way.

As part of the Allies' Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO), the 20th FG was responsible for daylight air operations while the British Royal Air Force (RAF) handled the nighttime flights. The 20th FG escorted heavy and medium bombers into German-occupied areas of Europe. In addition, the 20th FG carried out light bomber sorties. They machine-gunned, dive-bombed, skip-bombed, and high-level-bombed German airfields,

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[152] For more on the 20th FG and P-51 fighter pilots in general, see Jack Ilfrey's *Happy Jack's Go Buggy*, Richard K. Curtis' *Dumb But Lucky! Confessions of a P-51 Fighter Pilot in World War II.*

[153] Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 248.

[154] Twentieth Fighter Group Association, *King's Cliffe Revised,* memorial ed., (Hanover, PA: Sheridan Press, 2004), 112.

[155] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizens Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany,* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 305.

trains, barges, flak positions, gun emplacements, barracks, radio stations, and other targets.[156] The 8th AF was the only Allied unit that gave credit to fighter pilots for destroying enemy aircraft on the ground; this practice encouraged the 8th AF fighter pilots to strafe "targets of opportunity" on the ground. Strafing involves very low-level flying in which the pilot sprays targets with his machine guns. Once fighters had successfully completed their escort assignment, they were free to attack any enemy targets they encountered. The 20th FG's targets included locomotives, enemy vehicles and bridges. The practice of strafing was more hazardous than escort duties as losses on strafing missions were four times those of purely escort missions.[157] While low-level flying allowed pilots to get close enough to targets to inflict damage, it also placed them in increased danger because it made them vulnerable to small-arms fire from enemy ground personnel. Despite the dangers, the 20th FG continued to strafe targets because large-scale strafing increased the group's ability to contribute to the war effort and improved morale. The 20th FG believed that they were terrorizing and destroying the morale of German military personnel and citizens.[158]

It is debatable whether the bombing destroyed morale or not. What is not at issue, however, is the harm done to Germany's ability to wage war.[159] German losses in the European Theater taxed supplies of aircraft in other areas. As Germany's air defense was damaged, other targets were increasingly attacked. The German economy was compromised as the Allies attacked oil supplies, trains, bridges, vehicles and chemical plants. The numbers of weapons and equipment available were reduced and resources

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[156] Twentieth Fighter Group Association, 113.
[157] Frank W. Heilenday, *Daylight Raids by the U.S. Eighth Air Force: Lessons Learned and Lingering Myths from World War II,* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995), 8, 31.
[158] Twentieth Fighter Group Association, 112-3.
[159] See Heilenday, *Daylight Raids;* Overy, *Why the Allies Won.*

were diverted from fighting the war to coping with the bombing.[160] The diversion of resources caused the German army and navy to become short of both equipment and manpower. The actions of Steve and the 20th FG contributed substantially to the effectiveness of the CBO and, consequently, to the Allied victory.

[160] Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 130-1.

CHAPTER 5

JUNE 6, 1944: D-DAY AND AFTER

Clearly, one of the most well-known events of WWII is the D-Day invasion at Normandy and, due to their close proximity to France, the 20th FG was very involved, although they ultimately encountered less opposition than anticipated. During the first half of 1944, the 20th FG flew P-38s, which had a distinctive silhouette that looked like no other aircraft that was being flown at the time. Because of the unique shape of their aircraft, the 20th FG was chosen to fly patrols over the invasion force with the hope that the aircraft would be instantly recognizable to Allied forces, even from a distance. The 20th FG began flying at 3:46 a.m. on the morning of June 6, 1944. Each squadron, consisting of between fifteen and eighteen aircraft, was dispatched three times during the day, flying missions lasting approximately ninety minutes. On June 6 and for many days afterward, the 20th encountered little opposition in the air and began strafing targets on the ground, including troops, transportation targets and airfields while still carrying out their duties escorting bombers to France, Belgium and Holland.[161] They destroyed numerous enemy vehicles and bridges during these strafing runs.

Almost everyone knew that an invasion was coming eventually and, once it did, Kalamazoo citizens reacted. As Dunbar explains:

> While the city slept, the night of June 5, 1944, news came that allied troops had landed in Normandy. Those who stayed up late heard the exciting reports by radio. The next morning, in the churches of the city, prayers were offered up for the success of the invasion and for the safety of the Kalamazoo men engaged. On the home front thousands helped in one way or another with the war effort. War gardens were cultivated in vacant lots in and around the city. The Red Cross in addition to its many

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[161] Maurer Maurer, ed., *Air Force Combat Units of World War II,* reprint, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1986), 69.

> other war-time services, set up a canteen to supply sandwiches and coffee for servicemen passing through on the trains.[162]

The invasion was also fodder for newspapers in the U.S., who covered it incessantly. The headline of the *Kalamazoo Gazette* extra edition for June 6, 1944, screamed "Allies Invade France" in huge letters.[163] A map of the Europe was included with the call for citizens to "Save This War Map and Check Progress of Invasion News."[164] Most of the employment ads referenced the invasion stating, "Invasion, Now we've really got to 'Pass the Ammunition'"[165] before even mentioning the jobs they were trying to fill. Mutual cut-rate drugstore was having a "Victory Sale"[166] and citizens were reminded, "The Big Invasion Is On! Buy Extra War Bonds Now!"[167]

Kalamazoo citizens, including the Nelsons, would also have been following the progress of the war on their radios. One woman, only a young girl during the war, recalls the importance of the radio:

> Most of the war news came from the big cabinet radios that were a fixture in every living room. Meredith remembers the nightly ritual in her grandparents' home, when everyone would gather and remain absolutely still as they listened to the news from the front. With so much action on so many fronts and the filter of military censorship, they were getting only the big picture. For long stretches of time they had no idea exactly where their husbands were or how they were doing. There were millions of these young wives, women in their twenties, their lives in a state of suspension as they awaited the return of their husbands, always dreading that the unexpected knock at the door would be a telegram or their minister with news that he wouldn't be coming back. [168]

This continuous state of anxiety, fear and apprehension would certainly not be applicable only to the wives of servicemen. Without a doubt, parents, like James and Vera, and

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[162] Dunbar, 185.
[163] *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 6 June, 1944.
[164] Ibid. A2,
[165] Ibid., A7.
[166] Ibid., A8.
[167] Ibid., A3.
[168] Brokaw, *Greatest Generation,* 244.

siblings, like Esther and Carol, would have felt many of the same feelings that wives, like Phyllis, were feeling.

While citizens in Kalamazoo were checking invasion news on their radios and maps and Steve was flying missions over Europe, Art was in the States helping other pilots learn to fly. Art spent the war years in numerous places, beginning with basic training at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. He was sent for aviation mechanic training at Roosevelt Field in New York (fig. 17). Art then received further specialized training at Niagara Falls, New York; Tallahassee, Florida; and Perry, Florida.[169] When he was drafted into the Army, Phyllis was already pregnant with their first child, Janet, and they would both later join him for a short while at Perry AFB in Florida.

Despite his lack of experience, Art was a chosen to be trained as an airplane mechanic. Apparently, on the various IQ tests that the Army administered, he demonstrated proficiency for mechanical work.[170] This training would continue to benefit him, for he worked as an auto mechanic after the war until retirement; and he continued to work on cars well into his eighties. Art was trained first as an airplane and engine mechanic and then as a specialist on various planes, including the P-39, P-47, P-40 and P-51.[171] Later, while in Texas shortly before the end of the war, Art would be trained on P-38s.[172] Art's duties, along with his training squadron, included making sure that the various aircraft were always safe and ready to be flown. There were often pilots flying twenty hours out of every day; and inexperienced pilots could really do some damage to the planes. When Chinese pilots trained at Tallahassee during the war, Art

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[169] Rapp, "City to Honor Family."
[170] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, 25 February 2007.
[171] United States Army, "Arthur Matteson Separation Qualification Record," forwarded to author April 2007.
[172] Art Matteson. Interview with author, February 25 2007.

maintains the damage was especially bad. This is not surprising, considering his revelation that, because the pilots could not understand the tower personnel and vice versa, many planes were landed without landing gear in place.[173] Art was promoted to Staff Sergeant and was responsible for supervising five mechanics. His duties were described as "complete major overhauls, line maintenance, change engines, trouble shooting, perform inspections and make various types of repairs on aircraft and aircraft engines."[174] In addition, he would "taxi single and twin engine aircraft."[175] Art is proud that he was responsible for the planes that trained the pilots who went overseas. He is especially pleased to announce that not one of *his* planes was ever lost.[176] While this type of work was less glamorous than other war duties, mechanics and other support personnel were an integral part to the Allies' victory. After all, it is impossible to train pilots without planes.

Art's service included some funny moments as well. At one point, he and Steve "snuck home" at the same time without planning it with each other. At the time, Steve traveled home from Illinois and Art was stationed at Niagara Falls, New York. Art had a three-day pass but soldiers from his base were forbidden to leave the state. They were encouraged to go into New York City, which Art had done on previous occasions. Art had traveled to New York City and spent his time "in bars," seeing Broadway shows and visiting the Stage Door Canteen.[177] The Stage Door Canteen was a famous New York

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[173] Ibid.
[174] Art Matteson separation record.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Art Matteson. Interview with author, April 2007.

site and was "in the news constantly because showpeople turned up nightly to entertain the crowds of soldiers and sailors."[178]

This time, however, he decided that he felt like going home and set off for Michigan. He took a train to Detroit and, because he had a layover there, stayed with his sister, Harriett, and her husband, Walter. The next day Walter drove Art to Kalamazoo so he could visit with Phyllis and the rest of the family. Once he decided to return to his base, however, it was not without reservations. He planned to take the train back to New York but missed the first available train. Actually, he didn't miss it as much as he let it leave without him. He claims he "didn't feel like going back" right then so he watched it leave and "waved goodbye."[179] He managed to get on the next train to New York and arrived back at base two days late. His only punishment was "KP duty."[180] Art is unsure whether Steve's trip was eventful or whether he received any punishment.

Another Nelson who remained stateside, Kendrick, had completed his training as a Radio Operator-Mechanic at Sioux Falls Radio School and then became an instructor there, remaining throughout his service. While there, Kendrick met Grace Pratt, who was working in Sioux Falls. They were married on July 22, 1944, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Kendrick was not the only Nelson to marry during the war. In April 1944, Leo had married his fiancée, Carmen, while stationed in Garden City, Kansas.[181] The fact that there had been three Nelson weddings between November 1941 and the end of the war was consistent with the general feeling during the war about marriage, children and other

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[178] Casdorph, 35.
[179] Art Matteson. Interview with author, April 2007.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Sara Nelson to author, 10 April, 2007.

familial issues. Americans during the war years, as is common during most wars, placed a great emphasis on family life. According to Karen Anderson, a historian and specialist in women's studies, there were "1,118,000 more marriages between 1940 and 1943 than would have been expected at prewar rates."[182] Many couples that had been waiting, either because of the Depression or possibility of war, went ahead and married or had children. In addition to the rise in marriages, the number of children aged five and under increased twenty five percent.[183] While taking on new roles in the military and in war production, women during the war years still focused on domestic duties, such as homemaking, marriage, and reproduction.

The same month as Kendrick's wedding, July 1944, saw Joel transferred to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois where he stayed until October 1944. He was then sent to Camp Bradford in Virginia. From Virginia, Joel was assigned to USS *LST 878* where he stayed until he was discharged May 20, 1946.[184] *LST 878* spent some time in the Pacific after the war was over. According to his brother-in-law, Art, Joel and *LST 878* were involved in the Pacific Theater during the war.[185] At this point, however, the author has found no information to confirm that.

In late July 1944, Steve wrote a letter to his older brother, Lyle, who had been sent stateside due to medical issues. The letter was dated July 25, 1944, and Steve explains that he had attempted to contact Lyle when Lyle was in the hospital in California but just missed him. Steve discusses his life in England, saying:

> Well the tables are slightly reversed now but this isn't half as bad as I expected it to be. Don't get me wrong, "it ain't easy" but it is exciting at

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[182] Karen Anderson, 76.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, 25 February 2007.

> times and our living conditions are fairly nice and that makes all the difference in the world. But at present Jerry is so scarce that we hardly ever seen him. But I sure saw him one day a while back and he was flat on my ass but thanks to my element leader we got him off and I am still flying. I haven't even got a shot at any Jerries in the air as yet but I with the rest of our boys have sure played hell with [their] trains and trucks as you can read in any paper.[186]

Steve continues by telling his brother "after the war we'll pitch a real one. Write soon. Your 'kid' bud, Buck."

On August 2, 1944, the 20th Fighter Group was assigned to escort a group of 180 B-24 bombers who were attacking targets south of Paris, France. After seeing the B-24s to their target, the 20th FG took the opportunity to strafe targets of opportunity, including military locomotives, trucks and cars.[187] Unfortunately, Steve did not return from this mission, as his aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff. He lost control of his aircraft and crashed on farmland at Werrington, Peterborough, England. He was just a few miles east of the airfield.[188] His death is mentioned, however briefly, in Ron MacKay's book *20th Fighter Group*: "Lieutenant Nelson (55th Fighter Squadron) became the latest loss when he failed to survive a crash near Peterborough on 2 August."[189] Only one week after informing his brother that he was "still flying,"[190] Steve was buried with full military honors on August 3, 1944.[191] It is unknown whether Lyle received the letter before or after learning of his younger brother's death.

Reports from that day state that the weather was overcast and visibility was low. Steve was flying on the wing of Lt. Ken Smeltz and, when the planes lost visual contact,

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[186] Steve Nelson to Lyle Nelson, forwarded to author, May 2006.
[187] Twentieth Fighter Group Assoc., 173.
[188] David Knight to author, 6 June 2006.
[189] Ron MacKay, *20th Fighter Group,* (Carrollton, TX: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1995), 66.
[190] Steve Nelson to Lyle Nelson.
[191] Arnold E. Heimsoth to Vera Nelson, dated 6 August 1944, copy forwarded to author December 2006. Although the letter is dated 6 August, it was likely sent along with Ulio's letter of 16 August. Heimsoth's letter references both the telegram (dated 14 August) and the burial in England on 3 August 1944.

Steve did not answer radio calls from Lt. Smeltz. The destroyed aircraft was found and Steve had been fatally injured.[192] The reason for the crash is listed as unknown but the Army believed that it was likely that Steve became disoriented. In addition to the previously mentioned adverse weather conditions, Steve had only ten hours of instrument flying experience in the six months prior to the crash. Two other P-51 pilots had been lost in similar circumstances around the same time.[193]

In a July 1947 letter, Lt. Smeltz wrote to James Nelson and described the fateful day. Lt. Smeltz assured James that Steve was a good pilot and that he "was very happy to be flying with Steve."[194] Steve and Lt. Smeltz had known each other prior to serving together in England, as they had trained together in California. Lt. Smeltz described the foggy weather conditions and explained that visibility was so low that, at takeoff, they "could only see about half the runway."[195] He went on to explain, however, that he did not believe the weather caused Steve to become disoriented. He explained that, despite the fog, he and Steve maintained visual contact for quite a while. He said that, "Ever so often I would glance in my mirror and every time Steve was right on my wing giving me a big smile."[196] When he lost visual contact with Steve, the fog was already behind them. Lt. Smeltz informed James that he spoke with a farmer who lived near the crash site, and the man reported that "he heard the engine as though it was coughing and [the engine was] missing, then he heard the crash."[197]

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[192] David Knight to author, 14 June 2006.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Lt. Kenneth C. Smeltz to James Nelson, dated 29 July 1947, forwarded to author December 2006.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.

Regardless of the reason for Steve's crash, Lt. Smeltz informed James that "the loss of Steve brought much sorrow to my heart as well as many others because he was very, very well liked by all."[198] Lt. Smeltz visited the crash site immediately upon returning from his mission. He informed James that the aircraft "was in many pieces" and it "looked very much as though his engine had quit and that he tried to make a forced landing in the fog."[199] Another close friend, Lt. James S. Reynolds, identified Steve's remains by a ring on the hand of the body. Other personnel then identified the plane as Steve's.[200] The 20th FG lost eighty-five officers and four enlisted men during WWII but Steve was the only soldier lost by the 20th that day.[201]

Although Steve died on August 2 and was buried in England on August 3, the Nelson family did not receive notice of Steve's death until August 14, 1944.[202] The brief telegram stated only "The secretary of war desires me to express his deep regret that your son Second Lieutenant Stephen J Nelson [was] killed in action on two August in England" (fig. 18).[203] A letter followed on August 16th from General J.A. Ulio of the Adjutant General's Office in which he confirmed the telegram's message. Ulio explained that, although he understood their desire "to learn as much as possible regarding the circumstances leading to his death," battle conditions precluded the gathering and sharing of further details.[204] Ulio expressed his sympathy and conveyed his hope that "in time the knowledge of his heroic service to his country, even unto death, may be of sustaining

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] United States Army, "Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) of Stephen J. Nelson," National Archives and Records Administration, forwarded to author, July 2006.
[201] Twentieth Fighter Group Assoc., 173.
[202] "Lt. S. Nelson Dies in Action," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 14 August 1944.
[203] Western Union telegram to James E Nelson, dated 14 August 1944,copy forwarded to author December 2006.
[204] J.A. Ulio to James E. Nelson, dated 16 August 1944, copy forwarded to author December 2006.

comfort to you."[205] The chaplain of the 20th Fighter Group, Arnold E. Heimsoth, wrote to Vera Nelson expressing his sympathy as well. Heimsoth informed her that "all of us feel that we have sustained a great loss in your son's death."[206] The chaplain continued, "We mourn with you the loss of a real friend and a loyal soldier – a soldier who was faithful to his country and to our cause unto death."[207]

The family held a memorial service on October 1, 1944, at Bethel Baptist Church in Kalamazoo.[208] Four Air Force officers from nearby Kellogg Field formed the honor guard and a Kellogg Field bugler performed "Taps."[209] Four of Steve's five brothers were able to attend the memorial service, but Paul was stationed in the Pacific at the time and was not able to be present at the service. Steve's sister, Phyllis, her husband, Art, who was in the Army at the time, and their daughter, Janet, also attended the service (fig 19). Phyllis once remarked to the author, with tears in her eyes, that she hated to hear "Taps" played. Her husband, Art, concurred that she really could not stand the song and struggled with hearing it throughout her life.[210] It likely reminded her of Steve's memorial service, which was probably the first time she had heard it played to honor a relative. Even more heartbreaking must have been the fact that it was paying tribute to her younger brother, who was just 20 years old when he died.

After the war, the families of deceased soldiers had the option of either having the remains of their loved ones returned to the United States or having them re-buried in military cemeteries in Europe. Approximately half of the 20th FG's deceased were

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Arnold E. Heimsoth to Vera Nelson.
[207] Ibid.
[208] "Lt. S. Nelson Dies in Action," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 14 August 1944.
[209] Meader.
[210] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, 25 February 2007.

returned to the United States, while the others were buried in American military cemeteries in France, England, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.[211] The Nelsons chose to leave Steve in England. His body is buried at the American Military Cemetery at Cambridge, England (fig. 20). He was awarded an Air Medal, a Purple Heart and a bronze service star.[212] In March 1945, James and Vera were invited to a ceremony at Selfridge field in Kalamazoo where they received Steve's Air Medal (fig. 21).[213] They had been informed in January that Steve had been posthumously awarded the medal. The notice read:

> For exceptionally meritorious service in aerial flight over enemy occupied Continental Europe. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by Lieutenant Nelson reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States.[214]

In a letter he wrote in February of 1946, Steve's father, James, expressed a desire to some day travel to England to see his son's grave and he inquired about the details of Steve's death. Unfortunately, they were never able to visit his grave. Thankfully, in 1947, they received the details they sought, although not from the Army.

After Steve's death, in September 1944, the 20th FG participated in an airborne attack on Holland. Between October and December 1944, they escorted bombers to Germany and struck targets of opportunity in and beyond the Siegfried Line. Between December 1944 and January 1945, they escorted bombers to the Battle of the Bulge and flew patrols to support the attack across the Rhine in March 1945. As enemy resistance collapsed, the 20th FG flew escort and fighter-bomber missions in April 1945.[215] During

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[211] Twentieth Fighter Group Assoc., 274.
[212] "Military Records of Stephen J. Nelson."
[213] "Local Parents to Receive Medals for Soldier Sons," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 12 March 1945.
[214] Robert H. Dunlop to James E. Nelson, dated 13 January 1945, forwarded to author December 2006.
[215] Maurer, 68-70.

World War II, the 20th FG flew a total of 312 combat missions and over 69,000 operational flying hours from King's Cliffe. They claimed to have destroyed 443 enemy aircraft, 400 locomotives, 230 freight cars and 257 motor vehicles. They also claim to have killed or wounded over 900 enemy personnel.[216]

The year 1944 would see not only a Nelson son die but also the first Nelson discharged. Kendrick was discharged in December 1944 as a Private First Class. His rank is misleading, though, as he was promoted numerous times. However, each promotion was followed by a demotion, the result, more often than not, of fighting. Kendrick's son, Bob, informed the author that his father had quite a temper, which led to numerous fights in Sioux Falls.[217] Bob shared that one fight involved a taxicab driver who Kendrick felt was overcharging him for a ride. Kendrick took exception with the fact that the driver would take advantage of a serviceman in uniform and pulled the driver, apparently by his face, through the driver's window of the cab.[218] Kendrick's brother-in-law, Art Matteson, recalled that Kendrick did have a temper but did not remember it ever leading to any arrests or serious injuries.[219]

The Nelson family was not finished flying planes or seeing combat. In December 1944, Leo graduated from heavy bombardment school at Davis-Monthan Field in Tucson, Arizona,[220] and, after a short leave, was sent to Italy. Already Arizona's second largest city, Tucson grew even more during the war as Davis-Monthan was used as a training center for B-24 bomber crews. It also had a hospital and three bombing ranges

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[216] Twentieth Fighter Group Assoc., 116-117.
[217] Robert J. Nelson. Interview with author, January 2007.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Arthur Matteson. Interview with author, 25 February 2007.
[220] "Lt. Leo Nelson Home on Leave," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 23 December 1944.

and could be used for the training of B-29 bomber crews after an expansion in December 1944.[221]

Leo and his crew flew a B-24 "Liberator" bomber from Davis-Monthan to Italy via Newfoundland, the Azores, Africa and into Italy, leaving on January 20 and arriving on February 1, 1945.[222] After arriving in Italy, Leo piloted B-24s over Europe with the 739th Squadron, 454th Bomber Group (BG) of the 15th Air Force (AF).[223] He flew twenty-two combat sorties and received a certificate of valor and an Air Medal during his service with the 454th BG.[224] Leo could have accepted the Army Air Corps' offer to return to the States to train pilots; but he chose to remain in Italy with his crew (fig. 22).[225]

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[221] Osborne, 7.
[222] Howard Jackson to Carol Malmud, n.d., copy forwarded to author, May 2006; United States Army, "Certificate of Service of Leo J. Nelson," forwarded to author, May 2006.
[223] John S. Barker, Jr., ed., *The Flight of the Liberators: The Story of the Four Hundred and Fifty-Fourth Bombardment Group,* (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1986), 138.
[224] Jerry Nelson to James Nelson, 25 July 2002.
[225] Arthur Matteson. Interview by author, 25 February 2007.

CHAPTER 6

THE WAR CONTINUES IN 1945

Paul and the *Blue Ridge* were still busy in 1945. The *Blue Ridge* had traveled to Hollandia, New Guinea, to make preparations for the assault on Lingayen Gulf in Luzon, the Philippines. In January 1945, the *Blue Ridge* took part in the invasion of Lingayen Gulf and again participated in attacks on enemy aircraft. The Allied victory on the island of Luzon was an important turning point in the fight for control of the Pacific. Historian Dale Andradé feels that, "[I]n the final analysis, the fall of Luzon meant once and for all that the Japanese Empire was doomed.[226] The American success at Luzon finalized the Japanese loss of the Philippines and, much like the D-Day success led to the end of Germany, the loss of the Philippines virtually guaranteed the end of Japan. The Japanese were dealt a severe blow at Luzon but they would not surrender. As a result of Luzon, Allied forces were closer than ever to the Japanese homeland but that was not the only reason the battle was important. As important, if not more important, than the location of the victory, the fall of Philippines was an important psychological victory as it was the first time the Allies had driven the Japanese from an area they had captured early in the war.[227] The Allied success in the Philippines had softened up the Japanese defenses and greatly contributed to the eventual victory.

In February 1945, as the war in the Pacific Theater intensified, the Marines landed on Iwo Jima. Over in the European/Mediterranean Theater, Leo and the 454th BG were busy attacking enemy-occupied locations. It was from an airfield near Foggia, Italy, that the 454th Bombing Group operated as part of the 15th Air Force. Along with the 8th AF

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[226] Andradé, 30.
[227] Andradé, 30.

out of England, the 15th AF executed the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO), the joint US-UK operation designed to weaken Germany. The 454th BG participated in key battles in the Mediterranean, including the drive to Rome, the invasion of Southern France and battles in northern Italy. Their primary responsibilities were long-range strikes against enemy targets.

During February, Leo flew missions to attack the following targets: the Floridsdorf oil refinery in Vienna, Austria; the Obertraubling Airdrome in Regensburg, Germany; the shipyards in Pola, Italy; the railroad marshalling yards in Klagenfurt, Austria; and the Isarco River railroad bridge in Albes, Italy.[228] March saw a reduction in missions with only six, but those targets included a return trip to the Florisdorf oil refinery as well as oil refineries in Moosbierbaum, Austria and Kralupy, Czechoslovakia. The Liben tank works in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and marshalling yards in Wels, Austria, were also targets in March.[229] April 1945 would be the last month of operations for the 454th BG in Italy. Targets attacked by Leo's crew that month were all in Italy and included a railroad bridge in Campo di Trens, Italy; marshalling yards in Alessandria, Italy; and road bridges in Padua and Bassano, Italy.[230]

Leo's contribution to the war effort involved more than just his skills as a pilot. Through his leadership, he also had a positive impact on his crew, who respected him a great deal. Charles "Chuck" Poland, the crew's co-pilot, described Leo as a "good friend, a "heck of a nice guy" and a "hell of a pilot."[231] He also described Leo as "a great guy

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[228] US Army, "Record of Missions, Leo J. Nelson," forwarded to author, December 2006.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Charles "Chuck" Poland. Interview by author, July 2006.

and a very calm [and] collected pilot."[232] Howard Jackson, the crew's bombardier, described Leo as a "true American hero," a "superb pilot" and a "great friend."[233] Every single account the author has received about Leo has been extremely complimentary, so he must have been an impressive individual. Since Leo was older than most of the crew, having been in the military already for four years, he served as a big brother figure to many of his comrades. Jackson states that he was an "absolute leader with intense strength that carried a crew of ten men to safe haven."[234]

Before the end of the war, as part of the CBO, the 454th BG flew 243 missions, dropped 13,000 tons of high explosives and destroyed over 150 primary targets.[235] The 454th BG flew what would be their last mission on April 25, 1945.[236] Shortly thereafter, German troops in Italy would surrender, as would their compatriots in Germany, and the 454th BG made plans to leave Italy.[237]

On the Home Front, the families continued to worry about their soldiers and Americans were hopeful that the war would end soon. But, in many ways, life continued on as it had for years. Phyllis and Art would be blessed with their second child, also a daughter, when Diane Elizabeth Matteson was born on January 25, 1945, in Kalamazoo. At this time, Art was still stationed at Perry AFB in Florida. Also in the Nelson family, a common rite of spring, high-school graduation, was fast approaching. The Nelsons were impacted, as Esther would graduate from Kalamazoo Central High School in spring 1945.

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[232] Chuck Poland to Carol Malmud, 2 Feb 1999, copy forwarded to author, December 2006.
[233] Howard Jackson to Carol Malmud.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Barker, 13.
[236] Ibid., 78.
[237] Ibid., 79.

Esther Marion Nelson (fig. 23) was born December 3, 1927. Like her siblings, she attended Kalamazoo Central High School, where she participated in music and played the piano. Unlike her older siblings, the U.S. had been at war for her entire high-school career, and her high-school yearbook reflects that fact. Discussions of normal high-school events are full of military terms such as "The nine different divisions leave their home base of operations for other bases, where the battle against ignorance is fought daily."[238] Hall guards are called MPs; books are described as "wonderful ammunition for use"; and pictures of students in military uniform are featured. High school for Esther was undoubtedly different from that of her older siblings, as she would have spent a considerable amount of time with war efforts, such as the scrap drive and probably writing letters to all of the family members who were serving. It probably would have been nearly impossible for her ever to forget there was a war going on.

For Esther, the most powerful reminder of the war, however, would have been two specific sections: one featuring the names of students who left early for the military and the other listing the names of former CHS students who had been killed in action. Listed are 117 names of former students killed between February 1942 and spring 1945. If Esther were aware of all the places her brothers were stationed, as she read her yearbook she would have recognized a lot of place names. Former CHS students had been killed in Italy, the Pacific, on Luzon, at Leyte, in the Philippines and in England. One name certainly stood out for her: "Nelson, Stephen J., 2nd Lt. – A.A.F. Killed – England – Aug 2, 1944."[239]

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[238] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1945.
[239] Kalamazoo Central High School, *Delphian,* 1945, 44.

In spring 1945, as Esther was graduating from high school, Americans everywhere were anticipating the end of the war. News from Europe was encouraging as on April 30 Hitler committed suicide. On May 2, fighting ended in Berlin.[240]

[240] Lyons, 278.

CHAPTER 7

THE END: V-E DAY AND V-J DAY

When Germany surrendered, first in France on May 7, 1945, and for a second time in Berlin on May 8, 1945, Nelsons who were still in the service included: Leo in Italy; Lyle and Art, who were stationed stateside; and Joel and Paul, who were in the Pacific Theater. They would all remain in the military until well after the war was over. Military and government officials encouraged Americans to tone down any V-E Day celebrations, as the war was not yet over. It was announced that soldiers would not be discharged; in fact, those in Europe would be sent to the Pacific.

Fighting continued in the Pacific Theater, as the battle of Okinawa continued into June 1945. On July 16, President Truman issued a declaration that "called on Japan to surrender or face 'complete and utter destruction'."[241] On August 6, Colonel Paul Tibbets Jr. and the crew of the *Enola Gay* dropped their 9,000-pound nuclear bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima.[242] Three days later, another nuclear bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. The Japanese finally agreed to surrender and the various countries began working out the specifics of the surrender. August 14, 1945, was declared V-J Day and "one of the most spontaneous celebrations in history erupted. Men, women, and children rushed into the streets and headed, as if by prior agreement, for the center of every town and city in America."[243] Casdorph describes the scene:

> A string of anxiety-producing events – the death of a revered president and the swearing in of an untried one, the last days of Hitler in his Berlin bunker, the terrible slaughter on Okinawa, a scant 300 miles from the home islands – added fuel to the jubilant celebrations which followed the final surrender. In every part of the country and wherever GIs were

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[241] Lyons, 313.
[242] Ibid., 314.
[243] Ibid., 315.

> stationed around the world, news of the end was greeted with unrestrained cheering and rejoicing. From Bar Harbor to San Diego the entire population momentarily lost its balance in two or three days of gala merrymaking. [244]

Radio benefited from the end of the war as it was blessed with "the largest radio audience in the twenty-five year history of broadcasting."[245] President Truman "released all nonessential government workers for a two-day national holiday"; the New York Stock Exchange shut down; and citizens reflected on lives lost and prayed for peace.[246]

Back in Michigan, Kalamazoo celebrated along with the rest of the country. As Dunbar illustrates:

> On the evening of August 14, at 6 P.M., came the news that Japan had surrendered. Within less than an hour, most of the people of the community converged on the downtown section for a celebration. There was dancing in the streets, firecrackers were shot off, and every pretty girl in sight was bussed [kissed]. The tension was at long last released, and the whole community rejoiced. But it was a sad time, too, for many Kalamazoo homes which had lost loved ones in the war. [247]

It is unknown how the Nelson household celebrated, but it was likely with a mixture of sadness for the loss of Steve, happiness that the other six had survived and relief that the war was finally over.

The formal surrender ceremony for the Japanese was scheduled for September 2, 1945, in Tokyo Bay. It would involve 260 Allied ships from the Pacific Theater and was scheduled to allow "delegations from China, Russia, England, the Philippines, and other

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[244] Casdorph, 238.
[245] Ibid., 254.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Dunbar, 185.

countries involved in the Pacific conflict" to attend.[248] Paul's ship, the *Blue Ridge,* was undergoing repairs at Pearl Harbor and did not participate in the surrender ceremony.

The end of 1945 and first half of 1946 would see a flurry of Nelson discharges. Lyle was discharged in San Francisco on October 16, 1945, with the rank of Corporal. He had spent three years and two months in the Marines and had been awarded numerous medals, including an Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with two Bronze Stars and a Sharpshooter badge for his proficiency with a rifle. His unit had been awarded a Navy Unit Commendation.[249]

Leo was next to be discharged, receiving his release on November 3, 1945, at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. He had achieved the rank of Lieutenant and had also been awarded numerous medals, including an Air Medal with two Bronze Stars and a European African Mediterranean Ribbon with one silver battle star. Leo had spent a total of four years and over nine months in the military.[250] Leo returned to work for the U.S. Postal Service from which he would eventually retire.[251]

Two days after Leo's discharge, Art was discharged at Fort Wayne, Indiana, as a Staff Sergeant. He had served three years and over seven months and received a World War II victory medal and an Honorable Service pin.[252] While the stateside service of Art, Kendrick and Joel may seem less important on the surface, it was in fact critical to the Allied victory.

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[248] Craig Nelson, *The First Heroes: The Extraordinary Story of the Doolittle Raid,* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 327.
[249] "Lyle Nelson Military Records"
[250] "Leo Nelson Military Records"
[251] "Nelson, Leo J., Obituary," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette,* 11 July 1983, D4.
[252] "Art Matteson Military Records"

The United States had sixteen million military personnel in World War II but 25 percent of those never left the United States.[253] America was fortunate not to have become a battle zone, with the exception of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, a certain amount of troops needed to remain stateside to defend against possible attacks. In addition, troops were needed to ensure the training of new military personnel. One of the United States' advantages during WWII was its ability to maintain a steady flow of trained personnel. The United States Army, Air Corps, Marines and Navy were the best equipped and best trained of all combatants in World War II, and the American war machine benefited the other Allies. According to historian Richard Overy, "The Allies did not depend on simple numbers for victory but on the quality of their technology and the fighting effectiveness of their forces."[254] Unlike both the Germans and the Japanese, the United States placed emphasis on non-combat areas of war as well as on combat areas. Explains Overy:

> In both Germany and Japan less emphasis was placed upon the non-combat areas of war: procurement, logistics, military services. In the Pacific War there were eighteen American personnel for every one serviceman at the front. The ratio in the Japanese forces was one to one. . . In the German army in Europe there were roughly two combatants for every non-combatant; but the American army had a ratio almost exactly the reverse, one fighter for every two service personnel . . . The American back-up for its combat troops was formidable.[255]

The United States military was able to provide their combat troops with reinforcements of both personnel and supplies quickly and this made a difference in the war. The soldiers who were stationed stateside facilitated this accomplishment by training new personnel for both combat and support; by repairing and modifying equipment for both

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[253] Michael C.C. Adams, 70.
[254] Overy, 318.
[255] Overy, 319.

combat and training; and by being available to be shipped overseas for duty at a moments notice.

The Nelson twins would be discharged in 1946. Paul was discharged from the Navy on May 9, 1946,[256] and Joel received his release soon after on May 20, 1946.[257] Both served two years and three months and would receive medals and ribbons for their service. During World War II, the USS *Blue Ridge*, on which Paul served, was awarded two battle stars.[258]

Nelson family members were obviously not the only ones being discharged. Everywhere people looked, there were soldiers trying to get home or just enjoying their freedom from the military. August 1945 "was a time for going home; jam-packed trains and buses, in addition to bustling highways…carried millions of servicemen and civilians to homes of loved ones and to new jobs and to peacetime lives."[259]

With the exception of Steve, the Nelson family had survived World War II, even adding to their number with births and marriages. Not only did they survive, they may have even benefited from their service. For the most part, the Nelsons went on to lead very productive, successful lives, with at least one of them, Art, using skills learned in the Army to build a comfortable career. The loss of a 20-year-old son and brother was obviously difficult; however, the Nelsons were most likely very thankful that the others returned.

The worst part for the family must have been the thoughts about what could have been. Stephen Ambrose puts it like this:

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[256] "Paul Nelson Military Records"
[257] "Joel Nelson Military Records"
[258] Naval Historical Center, *History of AGC 2: Blue Ridge.* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 2006).
[259] Casdorph, 256-7.

> When I read the letters from the veterans I'm almost always impressed by their brief accounts of what they did with their lives after the war. They had successful careers, they were good citizens and family men, and many of them made great contributions to their society, their country, and the world. Then I think about those who didn't make it, especially all those junior officers and NCOs who got killed in such appalling numbers…These men were natural leaders. They died one by one. Of each of them, I wonder, What life was cut off here? A genius? It is impossible to imagine what he might have invented; we do know that his loss was our loss. A budding politician? Where might he have led us? A builder? A teacher? A scholar? A novelist? A musician? I sometimes think the biggest price we pay for war is what might have been. [260]

Steve was obviously smart, talented and dependable enough to become a fighter pilot; he possessed a strong sense of duty and responsibility; and he was well liked by others. He was raised by parents who instilled in their children a work ethic that would serve his siblings well. So while the loss of Steve was devastating, the family must have also struggled with thoughts of what might have been. Still, Steve was remembered within the family, as quite a few sons and grandsons would be named Steve.

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[260] Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 487.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Since 1945, World War II has fascinated Americans and its appeal shows no signs of abating. Over 60 years after the end of the war, in 2006, Americans continue to enjoy movies like Clint Eastwood's *Flags of our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* in 2006, and read magazines about it, *World War II, the History of World War II, America in World War II.* Thousands of books are available covering all parts of the war. The Internet contains countless websites dedicated to all aspects of it. Many of these books, magazines, websites and movies focus not on decision makers, like presidents or generals, but on ordinary Americans who did extraordinary things during this war.

On many levels, average Americans were the ones responsible for the United States' contribution to the victory. Regular people staffed the factories that produced the equipment and supplies needed by the troops; regular people participated on the Home Front by buying war bonds and the conserving the scarce materials that were needed by the military. In addition, the United States military was made up of millions of normal, ordinary people who conquered the Axis forces. Craig Nelson explains his thoughts:

> As a child I was taught that history is made by kings and generals, popes and presidents, leading their secular and spiritual nations ever forward. As an adult I learned that often enough the polar opposite is true – that the big moments just as often depend on the actions of ordinary people in extraordinary times. [261]

The times were certainly extraordinary, though the ability of ordinary Americans to do extraordinary things was doubted by some, including Hitler, who believed that Americans were too spoiled and self-centered to band together successfully. According to Ambrose, "Hitler had been sure his young men would outfight the young Americans.

[261] Nelson, xii.

He was certain that the spoiled sons of democracy couldn't stand up to the solid sons of dictatorship."[262]

The fact that victory was achieved by ordinary people, those "spoiled sons of democracy," may be one reason that World War II is still so popular for leisure and entertainment. The men and women who achieved this impressive victory are the parents and grandparents of many consumers of movies and books. We continue to be amazed that our gentle grandfathers or our old-fashioned fathers were the soldiers portrayed in *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*. It was a different time inhabited by different people who had few of the luxuries and conveniences we enjoy today. Maybe we wonder what we would do if in the same position. Would we be able to sacrifice our comfort, our lifestyle, and maybe our lives for the greater good of the country? Were Americans of the 1940s exceptionally patriotic? Was it patriotism or some other reason that inspired them? Ambrose explains his thoughts while talking about a group of post-WWII college students:

> Like all of us who have never been in combat, they wondered if they could have done it – and even more, they wondered how anyone could have done it…There is a vast literature on the latter question. In general, in assessing the motivation of the GIs, there is agreement that patriotism or any other form of idealism had little if anything to do with it. The GIs fought because they had to. What held them together was not country or flag, but unit cohesion. It has been my experience, through four decades of interviewing ex-GIs, that such generalizations are true enough…they were the children of democracy and they did more to help spread democracy around the world than any other generation in history…At the core, the American citizen soldiers knew the difference between right and wrong, and they didn't want to live in a world in which wrong prevailed. So they fought, and won, and we all of us, living and yet to be born, must be forever profoundly grateful.[263]

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[262] Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 21
[263] Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers*, 473.

It is because of these ordinary people that their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are able to have the comfortable lives we have.

In contrast, the lives of many of the American soldiers and sailors who defeated Germany, Italy and Japan were not painless or comfortable prior to the war. There were a certain number of soldiers from affluent families. However, the bulk of the armed forces came from families that had suffered during the Depression. Said Ambrose:

> Most of the youngsters who joined the military on December 8 and thereafter came from families who had endured the worst of the Great Depression. They had seen little of the promise and opportunity of America. Yet they were ready to fight when needed. Among them were African Americans and other minorities for whom the American promise was just words. [264]

So possibly part of the fascination lies in the fact that so many of those fighting for America probably expected little in return. All the same, they were tough and steadfast and did what many thought was impossible.

Another reason may lie in the fact that this was a total war. Stephen E. Ambrose believes that, "World War II continues to fascinate because it was so stupendous, because everyone's life changed as a result, because it was total."[265] Possibly World War II continues to captivate so many people for all of these reasons and more: because it was a total war that was fought by ordinary Americans who had already been through hard times.

The Nelson family is perfect example of the kind of ordinary people who helped win World War II. The father, James, was a typical 1940s dad. He was strict, a disciplinarian and his word was the final word on any subject. When he accepted the service pin to honor his sons, he spoke only briefly and was not overly emotional. He

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[264] Ambrose, *To America*, 94.
[265] Ambrose, *To America*, 103.

took no credit for himself or his wife and instead gave credit to his sons, as "They are the ones who are sacrificing."[266] Even when he received his son Steve's posthumously awarded Air Medal, the pictures show a stoic James shaking hands with the military presenter, looking him directly in the eye. Vera also took no credit for her sacrifice. In all of the articles about the Nelsons, she is not heard from. This is hardly surprising as she always struck me as a quiet, gentle woman. She also was the prototypical 1940s mother. She was responsible for the home and for raising the children, which she did admirably.

The Nelson children (fig. 24) seemed to be typical kids of the 1930s and 1940s. They took part in sports but not very seriously. They would not hesitate to fight, with each other or strangers, but not so much that it led to jail time or other serious consequences. There are numerous family stories of somewhat rowdy behavior; and yet all of the Nelson boys went on to become quite successful after the war. They seemed to be exactly what you think of when people use the phrase, "Boys will be boys." They acted up at times but ultimately became responsible adults. Some of the Nelsons were drafted while others enlisted. But they all felt a duty to serve when their country asked and undoubtedly made their parents proud. They were very much the warriors who went off to faraway lands to protect their home.

The members of the Nelson family were only eleven individuals in the millions of ordinary people who helped win the war. The family was not the only one to send all of their sons off to war. So while the contribution of the Nelson family is not unheard of, it is certainly exceptional, as they were members of a select group of families who were willing to sacrifice all of their male children for the war effort.

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[266] "Parents of Six Sons in Service Honored by City," *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*, 4 April 1944.

The Nelson family experience in World War II may best be described as Tom Brokaw described another family's experience: "The war had been a family trial but also an adventure."[267] Soldiers from the Nelson family were spread out all around the world and touched almost every front of the war. Nelson family members gave 229 months of service to their country and participated in critical battles. They received at least twenty medals, ribbons and commendations, including one Purple Heart and two Air Medals. For the U.S. military as a whole, less than 50 percent of military personnel who were sent overseas were ever in a battle zone.[268] Yet five of the seven Nelson soldiers were sent overseas; and all of the Nelsons who went overseas ended up in battle zones and participated in combat. In this way, the Nelsons did contribute more than many typical American families. The Nelson family sent approximately equal numbers of their sons to every theater: the European/Mediterranean Theater, the Pacific Theater and the Home Front. They all contributed to the war effort. During WWII, most parents could say, "I have a soldier there." Some could say, "I have a soldier there and there." However, few parents could brag that they had a son in every theater. The Nelsons could brag of this, but they chose not to. As a family, the Nelsons merely did what was asked of them and then came home to continue the rest of their lives.

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[267] Brokaw, *Greatest Generation*, xxix.
[268] Michael C.C. Adams, 70.

APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS

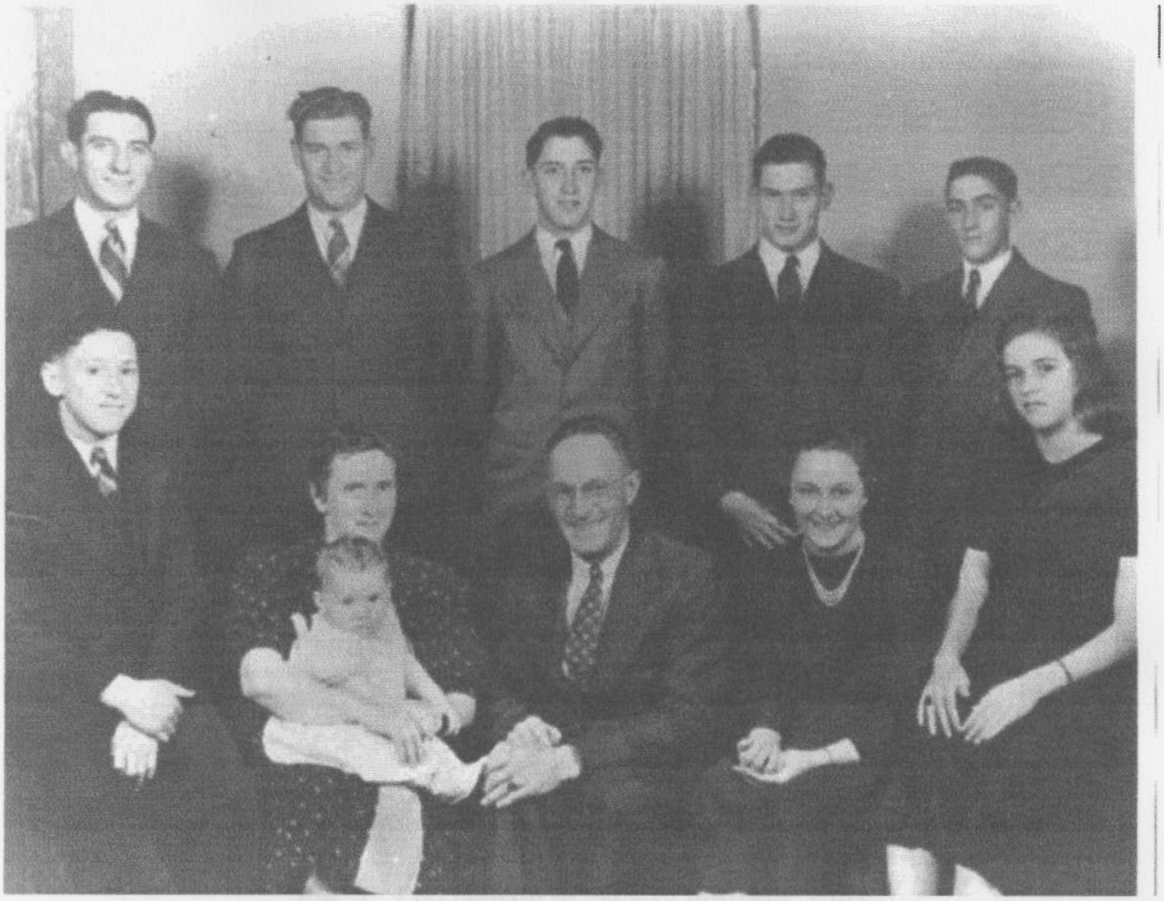

Fig. 1. Nelson family, ca. early 1942. Standing, left to right: Kendrick, Leo, Stephen, Lyle, and Paul. Sitting, left to right: Joel, Vera, Carol (on Vera's lap), James, Phyllis, and Esther.

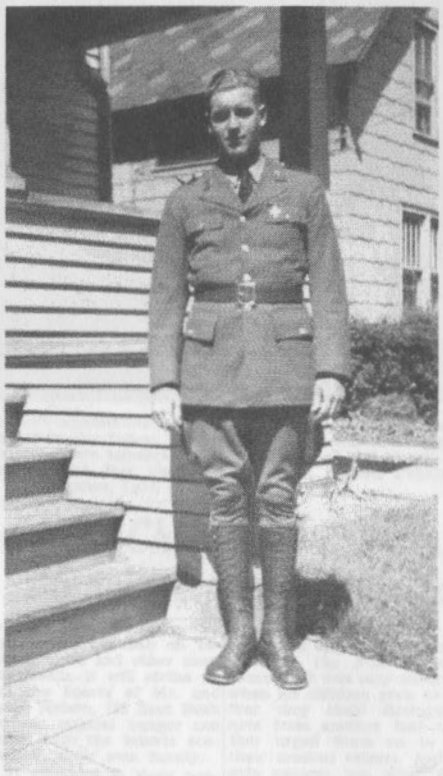

Fig. 2. Leo Nelson in cavalry uniform, 1941

Singing Comes Natural to This Family of 11

A one-family choir and the "singingest" organization in the city is the family of Mr. and Mrs. James Nelson, 125 East Bush street. Coached by the father, who has been a professional singer for 25 years, all nine children except the youngest have appeared in numerous school and church musical productions. In the front row are, left to right, Joel, Carol, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson, Phyllis, and Esther. In the back row are Kendrick, Leo, Stephen, Lyle, and Paul.

One Family Choir . . . the Nelsons . . . 'Singingest' in All Kalamazoo

If the day ever comes when war needs necessitate the ban on radios, phonographs, and other musical instruments, it will strike no fear into the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. James Nelson, 125 East Bush street, whose musical hunger can be satisfied with the talents contained within their own family.

With 11 members in their family, all but one have on more than one occasion displayed before Kalamazoo audiences that he is the possessor of a fine singing voice. Their eight children, Kendrick, 26; Leo, 24; Lyle, 22; Stephen, 18; Paul and Joel, 16; Phyllis, 20; and Esther, 14, have all appeared in numerous school and church musical productions. And while 13-months-old Carol has not yet made her musical debut, it will not be many years before she'll be following in the musical footsteps of her older sisters and brothers.

Long Professional Singer

But the children come naturally by their musical talents, for their father has been a professional singer for at least 25 years and perhaps longer, he doesn't exactly remember. The possessor of a fine tenor voice he, in earlier days, took a prominent role in the old Masonic minstrels, and for the last 18 years has been a member of the choir of the First Presbyterian church. It was only natural, then, when his children grew to the age that they could distinguish one note from another that their father urged them on to develop their musical talents. And it was only natural, too, when they entered school that their teachers discovered in them talent for school musical productions.

City's 'Singingest' Family

All the children, except Carol, of course, attended Lincoln elementary school and Central high school, and not one of them missed appearing it at least one operetta, choir, or quartet.

The one family choir is somewhat broken now. Leo is in the army, and Phyllis is married to Arthur Madison of Lansing. But the greatest delight of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson occurs when their children are all at home. Then with Esther at the piano, the whole family gathers around and sings the old time hymns that has been the family piece de resistance since the oldest of them chirped his first note. And with their tenors, basses, baritones, sopranos, and altos blending together, it is enough to prove that the Nelsons are the "singingest" family in Kalamazoo.

Fig. 3. ***Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette*** **article, exact date unknown.**

Fig. 4. Stephen Nelson

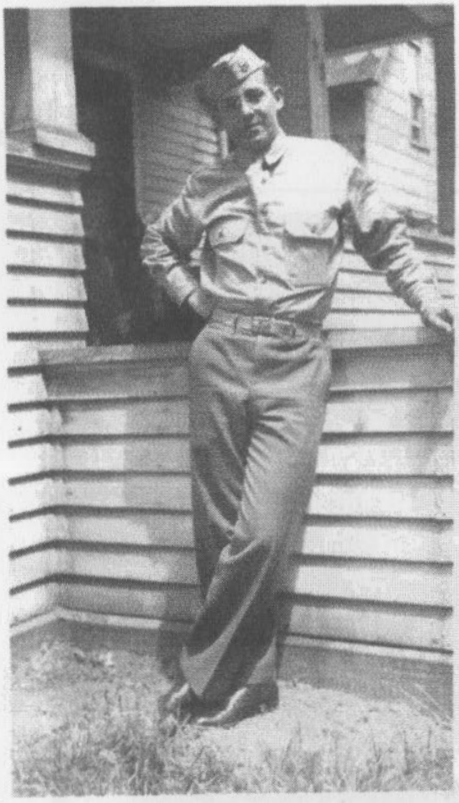

Fig. 5. Arthur Matteson

Fig. 6. Phyllis and Arthur Matteson

Fig. 7. Leo Nelson

Fig. 8. Lyle Nelson

Fig. 9. Kendrick Nelson

Fig. 10. Nelson window with service stars

Fig. 11. Kalamazoo Central High School, scrap metal drive.

Photo courtesy Archives at Western Michigan University.

Fig. 12. Joel and Paul Nelson

THE KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Meet Kalamazoo's 'First Family' of the Armed Forces

Meet Kalamazoo's "First Family" of the Armed services.
With six sons and a son-in-law wearing the uniform of Uncle Sam and representing the four branches of the armed forces, Mr. and Mrs. James Nelson, center, of 125 East Bush street, hold the honor of having the largest number of boys in service.

Fig. 13. *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* article, 8 March 1944.

Largest Service Family Honored by City Commission

Vice Mayor Lou W. Collins at city commission meeting last night presented Mrs. James Nelson, left, with a six-star Emblem of Honor pin, in recognition of her six sons who are serving in the nation's armed forces.

James Nelson, father of the sons, right, was presented with a six-star service pin by Mrs. Faye Becker, president of the Southwestern Michigan Marine Corps League Auxiliary.—Gazette photo.

Fig. 14. *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* article 4 April 1944

Fig. 15. Paul and Joel Nelson somewhere in the Pacific

Fig. 16. Lyle Nelson, second from left in back, with 3rd Signal Co.

Fig. 17. Art Matteson

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a Full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

1201

SYMBOLS

DL=Day Letter
NL=Night Letter
DC=Deferred Cable
NLT=Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

C16 30 GOVT=WUX WASHINGTON DC 14 450A

JAMES E NELSON=

125 EAST BUSH ST

844 AUG 14 AM 8 15

THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR SON SECOND LIEUTENANT STEPHEN J NELSON WS KILLED IN ACTION ON TWO AUGUST IN ENGLAND LETTER FOLLOWS=

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

Fig. 18. Telegram informing Nelsons of Steve's death

Fig. 19. Arthur, Phyllis and Janet Matteson

Fig. 20. Grave of Stephen J. Nelson, taken 29 May 2006 at the American Military Cemetery, Cambridge, England. Photo courtesy of David Knight.


Get Medals for Sons

Air Medal for his son, 2nd Lt. Stephen L. Nelson

Fig. 21. *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* article,

James Nelson receiving Steve's medals,

Fig. 22. Back left to right: Charles "Chuck" Poland, Leo Nelson,

Phil Cohen, Howard Jackson and crew with B-24 bomber

Fig. 23. Esther Nelson in 1944

Fig. 24. Nelson children, exact date unknown..
Back row, left to right: Leo, Kendrick;
middle, left to right: Steve, Lyle, and Phyllis;
front, left to right: Paul, Esther, and Joel.

APPENDIX B

METHODOLOGY

My research began with the *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* on microfilm at the Kalamazoo Public Library. Once I had copies of all of the relevant articles, I proceeded to attempt to contact as many family members as possible. Since I had never met most of these people, I started with my great aunt Carol Malmud, who supplied me with e-mail addresses for some of her nieces and nephews. My first success came when I "met" Jim Nelson through e-mail. Apparently, he had been interested in the World War II history of the Nelson family as well. He very graciously shared all of his information and pictures with me. He also contacted other family members to explain my project. Eventually, I was able to make contact with family members associated with almost all of my grandmother's siblings. I was able to conduct some casual, in-person interviews of family members at my grandfather's birthday party. These were mostly conversational with me taking notes. I also learned, and was able to confirm, much through e-mail interviews with these family members. I interviewed my ninety-year old grandfather in his living room, and he was able to confirm or clarify a lot of information for me. His interview was more standard, with specific questions and note taking. In addition to the above, I accessed city directories and U.S. censuses to make sure I understood where the Nelsons lived from roughly 1920 until the 1950s. I wanted to get a clear picture of when, why and how they arrived in Kalamazoo as well as their moves within the city as their family grew.

As soon as I was able to determine (from newspaper articles and family members) the units and groups of the soldiers and sailors of the Nelson family, I requested their

military records from the National Archives and Records Administration through the Freedom of Information Act. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed many military records so some of the responses were minimal. Between the military records, family accounts and a chronological review of *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* articles, I was able to put together a pretty accurate timeline of the service of every Nelson who served. Because some Nelsons saved their records and personal information while others did not, the amount of literature available varies for each son. Some groups, such as the Twentieth Fighter Group and the Four-Hundred and Fifty-Fourth Bomb Group, published yearbooks and have been the subject of other historians. For these reasons, it was much easier to find out facts about Steve and Leo than about other Nelsons. I have tried my best to combine family accounts, military records, historical accounts and other sources into as accurate a thesis as possible.

Through an assortment of World War II related message boards and web sites on the Internet, I was able to contact various historians and history buffs. Among the most helpful were David Knight and Nick King, both of whom live in England. Each of these men supplied me with pictures of Steve's grave at Cambridge Military Cemetery as well as information about Steve's service and the Twentieth Fighter Group. They guided me towards other useful sources as well. Joseph Chalker supplied me with information regarding Leo and the Four-Hundred and Fifty-Fourth Bomb Group. I was able to get contact information for one of Leo's crew members, Charles "Chuck" Poland, who responded to my letter and provided personal information about Leo. Arthur Sevigny, Syd Edwards and Lou Thole also helped with military information. Steven Turner, also in England, supplied with another beautiful picture of Steve's grave. I found contact

information for Kalamazoo Central High School online and wrote letters to each and every contact listed for the years 1933-1945. Florence Fenstermaker, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, took it upon herself to not only share what information she possessed but to also contact others for additional details. Because of distance constraints, all of the above interviews were conducted either over the phone or through e-mail.

For information about Kalamazoo, Michigan, I picked specific days during the war (i.e., December 7, 1941; June 6, 1944 etc.) and accessed the microfilm versions of the *Kalamazoo (Michigan) Gazette* at the Kalamazoo Public Library. I then read the whole newspaper editions from those days, and the days surrounding them, to get a feel for Kalamazoo at that time. Also valuable was Dunbar's account of the history of Kalamazoo.

Throughout I have capitalized "Home Front" because the majority of other published works did the same. Also, I attempted to explain terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader but I admit that, after a year's worth of military history, some terms are so familiar to me that I may have missed them.

I have included some works published by the United States Government. I realize that they may not be the most impartial sources; however, many of them were the best site to find details of battles and campaigns. I have tried to include a mix of popular writers, such as Stephen E. Ambrose and James Bradley, and more scholarly works.

One last note about the problem of memory is needed. Events that happened so long ago are likely to be misremembered, whether on purpose or accident. Likewise, family stories passed down from one to another are problematic for many reasons. In an attempt to present the most accurate story possible, I have tried to confirm everything

with secondary, and sometimes tertiary, sources. In the event that something is purely one person's opinion, I have done my best to make that clear.

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Service

Board of Directors, Member and Player Agent
Matthys Baseball & Softball, South Bend, Indiana